

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1337.—VOL. LII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 15, 1888.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[A RURAL SURPRISE!]

EILEEN'S ROMANCE.

CHAPTER II.

MAUDE DESMOND had said stiffly, in reply to the careless question about her sister's Irish name, that her father came of an old Yorkshire family.

Little did any of them who heard her suspect that the weary, dispirited man was the only son of an English peer; but so it was. The very August which made Basil Courtenay acquainted with Eileen witnessed Lord Desmond's death.

His lawyer's researches soon discovered the missing heir, and the sudden arrival of a clerk bearing the news of his father's death was the real reason for his abrupt departure from the humble lodgings in Rue Roasi. A week in London for needful purchases, and that the new Baron might understand his exact position, and then the little family went down to Yorkshire and took possession of Desmondville, once a splendid inheritance, now mortgaged to the hilt; once the resort of fashion,

now for ten years given over to neglect and obscurity.

"The Desmonds have come home!" said Lord Vivian, their nearest neighbour, to his wife. "They say he is horribly altered—looks quite an old man, and he can't be over fifty."

Lady Vivian sighed. "Have you seen him? What are the girls like?"

"I have not set eyes on one of them. Campbell came down to install them, and I met him in the village. He says things are pretty bad. What with the last man's debts and the present Baron's *post obits*, the property is drained. Of course they have the old house rent free, and he may be able to screw out three hundred a-year for them after the mortgagee has received his interest; but that's all. He says it would have been far better for them to stay abroad, but Miss Desmond had set her heart on coming here."

"What a pity they don't sell the property. His name is the last in the entail, so Lord Desmond could do as he pleased."

"He wouldn't get enough to clear off the mortgage even—if he has not sold the rever-

sion, which I expect. No, poor fellow, I can understand his liking the thought of ending his days beneath his own roof-tree; and, of course, there is always the chance of the girls marrying well. I hope you will call, Mary. You knew their mother?"

"I knew the first Mrs. Desmond, and detested her!" said the Countess, candidly; "but, of course, I will call. Miss Desmond was brought up by her mother's sister, so she will at least be presentable."

"You might ask them to dinner!" suggested the Earl, as he left the room.

A very pretty girl, dressed in the height of fashion, who had not yet joined in the conversation, turned to the Countess with a smile.

"I do believe papa's one idea of being kind to people is to ask them to dinner. Why do you look so grave?"

"I am a little worried," confessed Lady Vivian. "What have you heard of our new neighbour, May?"

May laughed.

"Only what all the world knows; that Noel Desmond and his father did not get on, and that, as a crowning act of folly, being



left a widow, he married his child's nurse, was cut by society, and sold out of the army."

"That is not quite right. He married his little girl's governess, and there was never anything alleged against her save that she was poor and friendless. I saw him once afterwards, and he seemed a new creature. His happiness and content were written on his face. Though he had been disowned by his family—though he had been forced to give up the care of his child—he looked satisfied. Their means must have been very limited; but I am sure he never once regretted his second marriage. The pity of it was she died."

"And left other children?" questioned Lady May.

"Only one little girl. There being no son, old Lord Desmond knew the title must soon be extinct, and he grew reckless. I think he tried to make things as bad as he could for his heir. Their position will be most peculiar. The oldest title in the neighbourhood, and yet so poor, I doubt if they will have enough for common comfort."

"You are sure to help them," said May, gently. "You help everyone. Matchmaking is your special hobby. You will set to work and find husbands for the girls."

"I shall go and see them to-morrow. I should like you to come with me, May."

"Then you must not pass through the South Lodge," said Lady May, promptly. "I am not a fanciful person generally, mamma, but I cannot face that woman."

"May, you are too absurd. What harm can she do you?"

"She makes my flesh creep. I have been hoping ever since I heard of old Lord Desmond's death that his son would get rid of her."

"I don't suppose he can."

"A man must surely be able to dismiss his servants!"

"You don't understand," returned her mother. "The old lord loved money dearly, specially in his later life. When he gave up society both the lodges were empty because he would not pay anyone to open his gates. They were almost falling to pieces, when he received a letter offering to rent the South Lodge on a long lease. It was a strange affair, but the idea of being paid instead of paying was irresistible. The bargain was struck for a bonus of a hundred pounds, and a rent of fifty pounds a year. He let the South Lodge to Mrs. Venn for a period of twenty-one years, she covenanting to keep the building in repair, and to see that the park-gates were opened for all who had business at the house."

"And she is a mad woman."

"She has kept strictly to her bargain," replied the Countess. "The South Lodge is a picture of neatness. I never saw flowers thrive as hers do. Instead of having to get down and open the gates for one's self, she seems to know by instinct when her services are required. If she were Lord Desmond's paid lodge-keeper she could not be more attentive."

"She pays fifty pounds a year for a cottage that is worth perhaps ten; she refuses all intercourse with her neighbours, and speaks of Lord Desmond as though he were a personal friend of hers. Mamma, I'm not prejudiced, but I do think there's something queer about that woman."

Lady Vivian only smiled. Large-hearted, and with a broad, liberal judgment, she considered if a peer were so poor he could hardly exist. It was cruel to expect him to dismiss a person who paid fifty pounds a year for permission to open his gates; but she knew May's impetuous nature, and that, well-founded or not, she had a great dislike to Mrs. Venn. So she never blamed her daughter's prejudice, and only repeated her wish that May should go with her to call on the Miss Desmonds.

"I am sure to hate them," said Lady May, as she took her place in the barouche. "Poor people are so hopelessly proag."

"You must remember they have had great disadvantages," said her mother, gently.

"Whatever they are, May, don't forget that they come of a family older than our own."

May winced. She was not a bad-hearted girl, but she hated oddities. She had already drawn mental pictures of her mother's protégées as awkward, bashful, ill dressed, and, perhaps, uneducated.

She knew that *noblesse oblige*, that as the daughter of their nearest neighbour, she must try and make things pleasant for the newcomers.

She was not going to shrink from her social duties, but she cordially hated them all the same.

Mrs. Venn flung open the gates, and stood watching them as they passed through—a singular object in a short, black silk skirt, and loose white jacket, her grey hair twisted round like a wisp of straw, a sinister expression on her wrinkled face—a woman who might have been a hundred, to judge from her claw-like fingers, her parchment skin, and sunken cheeks, yet whose small, beadlike eyes gleamed with the fire of youth—one who surely must have a history, and yet had chosen to take a servile office in the wilds of Yorkshire, and actually paid liberally to be allowed this privilege.

Lady May half-shuddered as they drove through the beautiful old avenue.

"I can't help it, mother. I am sure there is something uncanny about that woman. I seem to feel her eyes look through me."

"Nonsense!" returned the Countess gently. "May, do be reasonable."

Everywhere around them were signs of neglect. The grounds, which could have employed a large staff of gardeners, had for years depended upon what care Tony, Lord Desmond's odd man, could bestow on them. As Tony and his wife were the peer's sole retainers, and united in their persons the offices of cook, housekeeper, sick nurse and laundry-maid, butler, valet, groom, and companion, it may be understood the old tenant had not much time for horticultural labours, but the scene was beautiful even in its neglect. There were plenty of those flowers which, once planted, come up year after year of their own accord.

There were grand old trees whose lofty boughs seemed nearly to touch the sky. The grass had been carefully mown, and the rose-bushes—the season being very late in those parts—were yet covered with blossoms. A turn in the drive brought them suddenly in sight of the house, a large stone mansion, about whose walls the ivy clambered; while the broad stone terrace, approached by a flight of steps, looked cool and pleasant in the summer heat.

"Are the Miss Desmonds at home?"

Tony, in a suit of livery somewhat the worse for wear, replied in the affirmative, and conducted the ladies to the drawing-room.

The Countess had paid many a visit there, and could not have it in her heart to criticise the familiar scene; but Lady May had no such scruples. She looked round carefully, and decided two things—first, that the general effect was charming; next, that it must have needed no small taste and effort to have produced the result with such scanty means.

It was a long, many-windowed room. At one end door led on to the terrace, at the other heavy velvet curtains doubtless separated it from another apartment; all down one side were windows opening to the lawn, the other was nearly covered with pictures; the polished floor was bare save for a few bright-coloured rugs, an old-fashioned piano and a harp, a couch, whose faded covering was hidden by an eastern shawl of wondrous embroidery, having been thrown carelessly over it. A great profusion of white curtains, looped back with bands of old gold silk, a few antique chairs, one or two square-legged tables, a wealth of flowers everywhere in vases and pots, while the fireplace was quite filled by an enormous tree fern.

Probably only a few shillings had been spent

on the room, but it looked cool, shady and useful.

May's opinion of the strangers was beginning to rise when the door opened to admit Miss Desmond.

We have seen her once before. Basil Courtenay had admitted her beauty, even while resisting its spell; but the Maude of Rue Reoroi faded into nothing by the side of this gracious young châteline.

Miss Desmond had a little money—very little—of her very own, and this sum being spent invariably on her own adornment, she could always appear to advantage.

She had decided deep mourning for a grandfather they had never seen was ridiculous, so she only purchased one black dress, and spent the rest on whites and greys, mourning ribbons and hats.

To-day she wore a delicate white embroidered cambric, made in the housemaid style, a broad black sash and jet necklace alone marking her bereavement.

She went straight up to Lady Vivian and said gently,—

"It is very kind of you to come so soon! Papa will be so pleased!"

Lady May said afterwards she never knew anyone take things so much as a matter-of-course.

Miss Desmond's ease was perfect. She drew up a low chair, and sat between mother and daughter, talking as naturally as though she had known them all her life. But, in thinking over the scene, it occurred to Lady May that, though Maude had said a great deal, she had told them absolutely nothing they did not know before, while she had obtained from them a great deal of information.

Her manner in speaking of her grandfather was charming.

"I never knew him," she said, quietly; "but, of course, it was a sad blow to my father. I think he had always hoped for a reconciliation." He said, but for his children, he should not have cared to come to England.

"He lived abroad for a long time, I think?"

"He has been in Boulogne ever since I joined him last year. I think he had grown to like the half-foreign life; but I could not bear it. I longed for England."

"I suppose you do not remember Yorkshire at all?" said May, feeling she ought to say something.

"Not in the least. I was a mere baby when I went to live with my aunt, Mrs. Westwood."

"Her death must have been a great loss to you?"

Maude looked surprised.

"She is not dead. I often write to her, and am hoping to persuade her to come to Yorkshire."

Enter Lord Desmond, his careworn face lighting up with pleasure as he recognised Lady Vivian.

"This is good of you! I was hoping you would be a friend to my poor girls! I have been such a wanderer that they are both strangers in their natural home."

"It is so natural to see you here," said Lady Vivian. "The Castle has seemed quite lost without you!"

May had hazarded a wish to Maude to see her sister, and been so severely snubbed, that she turned to her father, and left Miss Desmond to the Countess.

"I am afraid I have been curious," she said to him, and May could be very sweet and attractive when she pleased. "Do you know, I expressed a wish to see your younger daughter, and Miss Desmond is evidently annoyed."

She was surprised to see his face change. It flushed with pleasure, yet he spoke in an undertone, so as not to be heard by Maude.

"Eileen is a dear little thing. My daughter calls her a spoilt child; but, indeed, Lady May, she has been the sunshine of my life! That child is just all the world to me!"

"And we may see her?"

"I should like it, but she is out now."

Maude does not care for her company here, and she is fond of roving."

"Well," inquired Lady May, as they drove home, "pray, what do you think of them?"

"Maude is lovely, and a perfect lady!"

"She is odious! Can't you see she keeps that poor old father of hers in the most perfect subjection? And as for the poor little sister, I don't expect we shall ever set eyes on her!"

"Maude was, telling me what an anxiety she found Eileen. She has been left to run utterly lost, and is perfectly untamed."

"Well, I mean to like her. I feel so irritated with Miss Desmond that I am inclined to delight in anyone she disapproves of."

"You don't mean half you say!"

"I mean I have taken an intense dislike to Miss Desmond!"

"Why?"

"I don't think she is sincere. Mamma, how old is she?"

"I don't know, May. She looks twenty."

"She is more than that. Lord Desmond says Eileen is eighteen. Now, if her mother was Maude's governess, there must be more than two years between the half-sister."

"Maude was seven when her mother died, and I think it was a year later that Noel Desmond married again."

"That makes nine years between the sisters, and the infantile beauty is twenty-seven. Perhaps that is why she is so anxious to keep her half-sister in the background."

"You are very uncharitable. What did you think of Lord Desmond? Perhaps you liked him better?"

"I think he is a kind-hearted man, but desperately weak. Anyone in the world could manage him; and I believe he is desperately afraid of Miss Maude."

"I have invited her to spend a few days with us."

May shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll try to be civil to her, but I wish you hadn't. I wonder what the aunt was like who brought her up?"

"A very simple, kind-hearted woman. Mrs. Westbrook was very well off, and very fond of her niece. Maude says she only left her because they heard Eileen was growing up perfectly neglected, like a little savage, and so she felt it her duty to go home."

"And you took all that in? Mamma, you are a great deal too good for this world. Whenever anyone praises their own motives to me I begin to distrust them. At the present moment my opinion of Maude Desmond is that she is an arch deceiver!"

The invitation came in due form. It was addressed to Miss Desmond; but Lady Vivian expressed a hope that she would persuade her father and sister to accompany her. There were to be plenty of visitors for the shooting, and a few dinner-parties must be given in their honour; and the Countess thought it a most suitable chance for Lord Desmond to renew his acquaintance with his neighbours.

"Of course you will go?" decided Maude. "It is the very thing I have been wishing for." Eileen clapped her hands—a most unfortunate demonstration, since it drew on her general attention.

"It has nothing to do with you," said Maude, coldly. "You must stay at home with the servants!"

"But I am invited!" pleaded Eileen, "and I want to go. I caught a glimpse of Lady May the other day, and she looks a darling!"

Poor Eileen! For the first part of her young life she had been alone with her father, and they had had but one will between them. Later on, when Maude joined them, though their peaceful life was changed, she could not be really unkind to Eileen, whose earnings constituted quite half the family income; but since they came to Yorkshire the poor little thing found herself perpetually snubbed.

Maude was Miss Desmond and mistress of the house. Eileen was no one; and Lord Desmond, though loving her dearly as ever, yet since his return to England seemed to have

sunk more and more under Maude's influence. She was his first-born—for her birth bonfires had blazed on the Yorkshire hills, and bells pealed forth in joyous chimes. Had he been a rich man she was his heiress. Eileen was just his pet, his darling; but she belonged to another part of his life.

"I should like to go!" repeated Eileen. "I am eighteen. Girls 'come out' often younger than I am!"

"You don't understand," said Maude, coldly. "You have no claim whatever on Lady Vivian. I am the child of her old friend. She and the Earl were my godparents. Of course they wish to do all they can for me."

"Why should she ask me if she doesn't want me?" demanded Eileen. "I only want to know that!"

"You can't go!" returned Maude, fiercely. "Why, you haven't a decent dress belonging to you. It would cost fifteen or twenty pounds to rig you out fit for such a visit!"

Lord Desmond interposed. His heart was on Eileen's side; but he was not a man of strong will. He rarely entered into direct antagonism with his eldest girl.

"I think Eileen and I will stay at home together!" he said, gravely. "I don't feel up to a large gathering, and I am sure my little girl won't mind staying to keep me company."

"You are very absurd," said Maude, crossly, "but anything is better than taking Eileen; so I will write to Lady Vivian, and tell her to expect me alone."

It might have been an alloy to her satisfaction had she known the relief felt by her father and Eileen as they watched her drive away. To Eileen it seemed almost as though the dear old French days had come again, while Lord Desmond blamed himself for being glad to be free from the advice and management so liberally bestowed upon him.

"A whole fortnight!" said Eileen, joyously. "Dad, don't you think some one must fall in love with her. She is so pretty and so clever! Wouldn't it be splendid if she came back engaged?"

Lord Desmond opened his eyes in bewilderment.

"Whatever made you think of such a thing, my dear?" he asked, in a tone of mild reproof.

"Everyone admires Maude," replied Eileen, slowly; "and I know she had a great many lovers when she was with her aunt. Then she hates being poor. She is so fond of nice things and being rich, and I don't see any way for her to get them unless she marries."

"Really, Eileen, you amaze me. Wherever do you pick up such notions?"

"I don't know. You see, papa, Maude worries us. You and I are not half ambitious enough to please her, and I can't help thinking we'd be happier without her. It would be dreadful to wish her to die, but we should lose her just the same if she married. And so I hope someone very rich and grand will fall in love with her, and then you and I will just live peacefully alone."

Lord Desmond stroked the fair head fondly, but his thoughts were sad ones. Live peacefully when a sword was suspended over his head, which at any moment might fall!

For a good many years past his life had been blighted by a heavy fear; but the fear had deepened tenfold since he came home to his ancestral home, and knew that the disgrace, which must surely come one day, would fall, not on the unknown recluse of Rue Rocroi, but on the old and honoured title of Lord Desmond.

He and Eileen had wandered half-unconsciously to the lodge-gates. Mrs. Venn sat outside her door shelling peas. It was the first time she and her new landlord had come face to face.

"It's a fine day," she said, civilly enough, but as familiarly as though Lord Desmond had been a friend of long-standing. "And so you've not gone to Vivian Court after all?"

Eileen, who had made acquaintance with

the old woman, and was quite at ease with her, answered readily enough,—

"We preferred to stay at home. What splendid pears! Are they out of your own garden?"

"Yes," and Mrs. Venn looked proud of the answer. "I've the best fruit and vegetables for miles. I don't grudge any expense, and I'd back my garden against Lord Vivian's own. I'll send you up some of these same pears, Miss Eileen, if you've a fancy for 'em."

Eileen laughed, and accepted. She had wandered on in search of some flowering honeysuckle, and Lord Desmond found himself *tête-à-tête* with his peculiar tenant.

"I reckon they've been at you to give me notice," she said, coolly. "That fine madam, Miss Desmond, turns up her nose at me, I daresay?"

An awkward question, since Maude's objections to Mrs. Venn were as strong as those cherished by Lady May.

Lord Desmond had been tormented day after day by his daughter's entreaties, and had at last taken refuge in the remark he could not afford to lose fifty pounds a year. He had not dared to tell Maude of a slip of paper in his father's writing which his lawyer had conveyed to him in a sealed envelope, assuring him he had promised the late lord to deliver it with his own hand.

"If you are conscious of any secret in your life you do not desire published keep peace with the woman at the South Lodge. She knows something about you what I have never discovered."

It was hardly likely after this Lord Desmond should venture to evict Mrs. Venn. Indeed, there was a grave doubt whether he could do so, since the agreement granting her the lease of South Lodge for twenty one years had been drawn up by a lawyer perfectly in form. The needy peer was glad to make an excuse of his poverty when Maude urged her wishes, but he had been very curious to see Mrs. Venn, and now the meeting had come about.

"I have no intention of giving you notice," he said, calmly. "My father chose to give you a lease of this lodge. It was a most eccentric thing to do, but no doubt he had his reasons."

She nodded her head emphatically.

"He had! I'm not a vicious woman, my lord; but I give you fair warning, it'll be an evil day for you and yours if you try to make me leave this house!"

"I have no intention of trying, but I do not admit any fear of your threats. I feel certain I never saw you in my life before."

"Then you make a great mistake."

Lord Desmond looked at her again.

"I am certain I never spoke to you before."

"Ah, that's different, but you've seen me lots of times. Why, I was at your wedding."

He marvelled in what capacity, Mrs. Venn, waxing confidential, went on to enlighten him.

"I don't mean the time down here, when you had a great fuss, but up in London, in that miserable, musty-smelling church which has been pulled down this many a year, I wasn't much over sixty then. I'm turned eighty now; so I daresay I've altered, but I was there. I saw you put the ring on her finger."

And you saw my wife—Eileen's mother?"

"I saw her right enough. She was too good for the likes of you. Men are poor creatures, even the best of 'em, and you were a good way off that."

It was impossible to resent this extraordinary criticism. Mrs. Venn spoke as indifferently as though she merely repeated a well known fact.

"Eileen is like her mother," said Lord Desmond, slowly; "at least I think so."

"She is as like her as one pea to another," acquiesced Mrs. Venn. "You see that you take care of her; men are bad creatures, still I'll own you seem fond of her."

"Your experience does not seem to have

been happy," said Lord Desmond. "Perhaps your own husband—"

"My husband died of a broken heart," returned the extraordinary woman. "He wasn't a bad man, as men go, but he was a very stupid one. However, he's been dead these twenty years, and we need not talk of him."

"Eileen," said her father, as they walked home, "do you know I have been lectured on taking care of you?"

"By Mrs. Venn? What a funny woman she is!"

"Then you have spoken to her before?"

"Oh, yes! She tells me such amusing stories, and I think she must have travelled all over the world. Her heart seems set on staying at the lodge. I hope you won't send her away?"

"I can't, my dear," replied Lord Desmond, slowly. "I must grow a great deal richer before I give up fifty pounds a year to gratify Maude's prejudices."

Miss Desmond would not have felt flattered could she have seen how thoroughly those she had left enjoyed their freedom. Eileen and her father spent their days out-of-doors. Together they made rambles to the haunts of Lord Desmond's youth. They made charming little excursions to Whitby, when they pined for sea breezes, and oftener spent long afternoons in the woods gathering blackberries, collecting ferns, and, in fact, enjoying themselves much after the manner of grown-up children.

They were careful not to venture on the Vivian estates, feeling that they often presented an appearance which would strike horror into Maude's heart; but, one day, when they were soon expecting their mentor back, they planned an expedition to some cliffs on the road to Whitby. They would go through the woods, picnic in the fields, and come home to a late tea. Lord Desmond, who sketched a little, would take paper and pencils; Eileen, who was making a fernery at Desmondville, went armed with a trowel and a huge basket. There was nothing common or vulgar about the pair, yet certainly they presented a spectacle trying to a young lady's well-regulated mind. Lord Desmond in white trousers, painting jacket, sailor hat, much encumbered with camp stool and easel, luncheon, etc., was not as imposing to look at as most peers of the realm.

Eileen in a plain grey dress, very ancient hat, much resembling in shape a small umbrella, a trowel, a knife, and a huge basket, was as unfashionable-looking as her father; and when the two, fairly tired out, sat down in a shady corner under a hedge, to eat bread-and-cheese, at a distance people might have been forgiven for setting them down as tramps.

That very day there was a great shooting expedition from Vivian Court, and the ladies had promised to meet the sportsmen with lunch; but Lady May cried off from the party after lunch. She declared there was something forlorn in a dozen ladies returning disconsolately back to the house. It was ages since she had been for a good long country walk. She should go home through the woods, and if her cousin thought he had slaughtered enough birds for that day he might accompany her, and tell her all about the preparation for his sister's wedding, which, as she was to be one of the bridesmaids, naturally interested her.

A number of young ladies together would be likely to look abashed if one of them deliberately told off the most fascinating young man of the party to her own exclusive society, but no one made a jealous observation when the cousins walked off together. The whole world knew that Lady May's escort must marry money, an heiress-bride, or celibacy was his destiny. Then Lady May was the only child of a wealthy Earl; she and her cousin had been allies from childhood. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should marry.

This was probably the opinion of all but the

two most concerned. May Delaval was one of those girls (whose number decreases, alas!) who can be intimate with a young man without thinking of marrying him; and the gentleman in question having played with her in the days when she wore socks and white pinafores, regarded her rather in the light of a sister.

"I am so glad you have come, Basil," began May, "though it's awfully wrong of you to turn up only just now when we expected you weeks ago!"

"I have been at Boulogne with the Ernestoliffs."

"There is not a Miss Ernestoliff, I believe."

Basil Courtenay laughed.

"Oh, dear no! only two sons. They are not quite your style, May, but I am fond of the whole family. Alan will take good care of Lucy, and I would recommend Bob to your ladyship but for the fact of his being hopelessly in love already."

"Poor young man! And you stayed in Boulogne to console them?"

"Hardly that. Boulogne's a very amusing place."

"Miss Desmond always speaks of it as though it were a desert, but I forgot you've not seen her. Basil, if you fall in love with that girl I'll never forgive you. She is odious."

"Is her name Maude? Has she black hair?"

May clasped her hands.

"Then you know her? How delightful! Basil, I hate that girl. Don't look so shocked, sir. I do, and she has actually got round my mother and his lordship till they think her perfect."

"I wonder if it's the same? A father and two daughters, perfect gentlefolks, but as poor as church mice. No one knew them in Boulogne."

"Then how did you? Of course, it's the same."

"Bob cherished a hopeless attachment (his twentieth) for Miss Desmond, and, to relieve poor Mrs. Ernestoliff's anxiety, I made a few inquiries about them. The strangest thing was the way they disappeared. They had lived in the place fifteen years without a visitor. A strange man called on them, and a few hours after they had left Boulogne."

"There's something stranger still that you should come here just now to find Miss Desmond staying with us, and your uncle and aunt in raptures with her."

"But—"

"The encumbrances, you would say. Well, I can't tell you much about them. I saw the father once, and rather liked them. The younger sister is never seen beyond their own grounds. Mother included her in the invitation, but Miss Desmond preferred to leave her family at home."

"You haven't told me where they live?"

"How stupid of me! He is Lord Desmond now, and they live at Desmondville, which is almost in ruins. They are awfully poor, and my dear mother has taken up Maude, and means to find her a rich husband."

"Poor Bob!"

"Perhaps he'd do if he were rich enough?"

"And I shall see this syren to-night?"

"Yes, you are just in time. She leaves us next week."

A turn in the path and Lady May came full in view of two persons leisurely discussing their dinner under the shade of a blackberry hedge. An unfriendly breeze blew off the straw hat, and her ladyship, who had quite a gift for remembering faces, at once recognised Lord Desmond.

"Basil," she whispered to her cousin, "there they are, the fair Maude's family. Oh! if she were only here she would be ready to die of dismay!"

But May Delaval had none of Maude's scruples. To her correct costumes and conventional habits were not indispensable. She went up to Lord Desmond as naturally as though she had been in her own drawing-room, and put out her hand.

"I am so glad to meet you! This is my

cousin, Mr. Courtenay. May we sit down and talk?"

There was something touching in Lord Desmond's eyes; he showed no signs of being detected in a strange position. He took Lady May's hand with comely grace, and said, quietly,—

"I should be glad to meet any cousin of yours, but I know Mr. Courtenay already, and owe him a debt of gratitude no words can repay. This is my little girl, Lady May, and he saved her life. We thought his name was Ernestoliff then. Eileen, my darling, thank Mr. Courtenay!"

Eileen blushed crimson. Her hat had fallen off, and her beautiful hair shone like gold in the autumn sunlight. May Delaval understood now why Maude kept her in the background. She might lack Maude's regularity of features, but she was a lovely child. Those dark, violet eyes, with their long lashes above, would have made her face charming. As it was, the clear, open look, the intellect shining in her expression, and the tender, wistful smile, made up a whole few could resist. Maude Desmond might win admiration, but Eileen would charm hearts and keep them.

She put her little hand into Lady May's after she had spoken her simple thanks, and May Delaval felt more taken with her than she had ever been before with any girl at first sight.

"I am sure we shall be friends," she said, impulsively, "but you know I am very angry with you. Why wouldn't you and Lord Desmond come to us?"

"We sent you Maude," said Eileen, prettily evading the question. "Papa and I have decided that she shall represent us on all social occasions. You see we are not used to visiting, and it would take up all poor Maude's time if she had always to teach us how to behave."

"You are not a bit like her!" Eileen flushed slightly.

"I know," she said, simply. "I used to fret about it; but you see our lives have been so different. I never could grow into a fashionable young lady."

"Don't try," said May, simply. "You are nicest as you are. Isn't she, Lord Desmond?"

"Don't spoil her, Lady May," said the father, fondly. "She is a little rustic who has spent all her life in a small French town, so that we cannot expect her to be like an English girl."

"Do you know my sister was terribly disappointed at your abrupt departure, Miss Eileen?" said Basil. "She said you vanished like a fairy."

"I wanted to go and thank her before we came away; but Maude said it would only trouble her."

"Lucy would have been so pleased. I must tell her I have seen you. She is going to be married next month!"

"I thought she was engaged. Is it to that tall gentleman with the beard?"

"Yes, Mrs. Ernestoliff's eldest son. They have been in love since they were children!"

"And I am to be her bridesmaid," said Lady May. "Miss Eileen, if I drive over to fetch you will you persuade Lord Desmond to come and spend a long day with us to-morrow?"

Eileen telegraphed a look at her father. She wanted to go, but she had two heavy obstacles—her toilet and Maude. Perhaps long practice had made Lord Desmond very quick to understand her signals, for he at once began to excuse himself.

"I shall be hopelessly offended," persisted May. "Do come, Lord Desmond, and bring your daughter? I see she is fond of ferns, and I have a good many rare ones to show her."

But Basil Courtenay understood the case far better than his cousin.

"I shall tell Miss Desmond you are afraid

of her if you refuse, Miss Eileen, and I am sure she won't like to be thought a tyrant."

"Do come," urged May. "Mother wants to know you. You see you were out the day we came to call."

She gained her end. As a fact she mostly did; and then, when she had taken leave of father and child, she and Basil plunged into a narrow winding path which would lead them into the Vivian grounds.

"She is very pretty; but, Basil, I don't think her sister is kind to her, and Lord Desmond looks weak. If ever it came to an open difference he would not dare to take her part."

"How you jump to conclusions, May! Depend upon it Miss Desmond will find a rich husband for herself, and leave her father and sister to their own devices."

"I hope she won't find one for Eileen?"

"Don't be absurd," said Basil, sharply. "Eileen is a mere child, and Miss Desmond has too much to do for herself to go match-making for other people."

Lady May shook her head.

"Men have fallen in love with children before now. If ever a good match offered for that pretty Eileen depend upon it she would be made to accept it."

"The days of imprisonment for refractory daughters are over, May," returned Basil, rather irritably.

Lady Vivian did not seem particularly pleased with her daughter's news. Miss Desmond had obtained a great influence with the Countess, and, therefore, my lady regarded Eileen through her sister's spectacles, and told May with a houseful of guests a hoyden school girl would be a great difficulty. Basil Courtenay, to his cousin's surprise, interposed,—

"I don't think Miss Eileen Desmond ever was at school, and she is certainly no hoyden. My sister Lucy knew her at Boulogne, and was very fond of her. I predict, Aunt May, you will be so too."

Eileen had never in her life spent a day with other people. The kind of toilet required for lunch at an English country house was an enigma to her, but her wardrobe being limited she had little difficulty in making a decision.

Her newest dress was a grey nun's veiling trimmed with velvet. It had been made in London, and fitted well. This, with soft lace at her throat and wrists, was the best array she could muster. Mrs. Ball, the old house-keeper, plaited her hair, and when Lady May drove up in her pony-carriage she found both her guests waiting, and looking very different from the couple she had surprised yesterday.

May Delaval, in point of age, came between the two sisters. She was twenty-two, and in some things quite a woman of the world; but in spite of this she retained much of the girlish enthusiasm and eagerness of early youth.

May was given to take prejudices both for and against people. Having conceived one in favour of Eileen, she was most anxious that her protégée should make a good impression on her mother and the chief guests at Vivian Court.

The Countess and her nephew came forward to greet the new arrivals. Lady Vivian half started as she saw Eileen, and, to her daughter's surprise, bent and kissed her.

"My dear, you are so like my sister who died when I was quite a child. She was my favourite of all the family, and, though it is years ago, I have never forgotten her."

Basil was recommended to do the honours of the conservatory. Lady May went indoors, and the Countess, on Lord Desmond's arm, followed the young couple at a distance.

"You ought to be a happy man!" said the lady. "I never saw anything more charming than your daughters in their different styles."

"They are happy in your praise," he said, simply. "Poor girls, they deserve a brighter future than their father has been able to afford them."

"They are sure to marry," said my lady, frankly. "Indeed, there is a gentleman here who admires Maude intensely. He has not yet spoke definitely but, he seems her shadow, and when he is not with her he is always questioning one about 'Miss Desmond.'"

Lord Desmond smiled. Perhaps in his heart of hearts he would have felt glad to be free from Maude's stern rule.

Eileen and Basil had disappeared through a leafy shrubbery. The Countess and her escort were preparing to follow them when they came face to face with another couple—Maude Desmond, perfect in all her elegant array, leaning on the arm of a grave, middle-aged man, whose stern features melted into a smile at one of her gay sallies.

"Ah!" said the Countess in a whisper, "the very man I was speaking of." Aloud, "Let me introduce you to Lord Desmond, Mr. Goldsmith."

But she was not prepared for the effect of her words. As she pronounced the name of Goldsmith Lord Desmond tottered, and would have fallen but for the aid of the stranger's arm. His face was ashen white. Great drops of sweat stood on his brow. He looked like one smitten with a mortal fear. With quiet command Mr. Goldsmith declared it was but a passing faintness. The patient needed air. If they would stand aside Lord Desmond would soon recover from this momentary attack of giddiness. Then, as soon as he had managed to get the two ladies beyond earshot, he bent over the unhappy man, and whispered,—

"For Heaven's sake, command yourself, my lord! Your secret is safe for me, but you are going the very way to arouse public curiosity."

"Say it again," moaned Lord Desmond, hopelessly. "Do you really mean it?"

"You are perfectly safe for me," repeated Adam Goldsmith; "and I believe no other living creature knows the truth."

(To be continued.)

A DESPERATE DEED.

—:—

CHAPTER XIII.—(continued.)

LILIAN lifted her great shining eyes and looked across at him. She laughed reassuringly, perhaps a little too loudly.

"Oh, she came back, yes, but none ever saw her again as she used to be. A stranger might see no change. We all did. She who before had fairly floated, for she could scarcely keep her feet from dancing, walked wearily and slowly. She, whose laughter had been so ringing and spontaneous, rarely smiled. She had moods. She had grown sullen, excitable, capricious. All the innocence, the glad-heartedness, all 'the wild freshness of morning,' had gone from her for ever."

She had spoken slowly, deliberately, her eyes still gazing downwards as though reading in the fire the story she told.

"And why?"

He was not feigning interest now. He was leaning slightly forward, his elbow on the arm of his chair, his head on his hand.

"This was her story: In London, at her aunt's house, she had met a man—a frank, fine-looking fellow, a captain in a Calcutta regiment. It was a case of love at first sight. He was a captivating, manly, sunny-faced fellow, and she was pretty and impressionable. He was highly-connected, but poor—in fact, in debt. She had money coming to her, dependent on her aunt's approval of the marriage."

"They dare not allow their attachment to become known. When he proposed a secret marriage she—very young and romantic, you must remember—thought it would be delightful in real life as in a novel. The mystery would be enchanting. How loyal her heart

would be to him when 'lovers around her were sighing,' and how they would astonish everyone some day when he had succeeded to the heritage of his expectancy by saying, 'We have been married and faithful all these years!' And she dreamed of a cottage

"Bowered in roses and covered with thatch, After the fun of a runaway match,"

and all that sort of thing, you know—poor little fool!"

She was silent.

The Earl looked at her curiously. How much the relation of the story seemed to affect her! How tremendously in earnest she was!

Well, no wonder. She and this girl she spoke of had probably been dear friends and associates.

But he wished she would hurry. The carriage would soon be at the door.

"Well, she married him, in strictest privacy," the Countess resumed.

She left her place by the fire, came over to her husband's side, and sank down on a low stool beside him.

"She told her aunt she was going to visit a school friend, and she went away to a little, lonely, sea-coast town and lived six weeks with him. Then, fearing detection, she returned to her aunt's house. There, one morning, a man called to see her. It was her husband's servant. He had a box in his hands—a little box. He gave it to her. She opened it. Within were the few notes she had written him, her picture, a flower she had given him, and a ring of her hair hair. She could not speak. She was simply dazed. At last she faltered,—

"My husband?"

"The fellow laughed insultingly.

"I guess you haven't got any. The captain gave me those traps to bring back to you. He's got dead loads of such stuff. He sailed for Calcutta yesterday. When he returns, in a couple of years, he's going to marry his cousin."

"And he mentioned her name—a rich and titled lady—Clotilde Rayne."

"She was crazy. But still she could not believe it. She could only say, stupidly,—

"I was married!"

"And for answer the wretch before her joined his hands, rolled up his eyes, and said,—

"Of course you were! And the minister wore a rig rented for the occasion at two-and-sixpence. And I was the minister!"

"She didn't die. No one ever does when they most long to. She did not even faint. She was afraid of her aunt appearing. She got him to leave by promising to meet him in the park. She did so. He offered to marry her, clothing his proposals in words so insultingly condescending, it is a wonder her rage and scorn did not kill him! Then it was she came back to the Honour."

The Countess paused.

The Earl stooped, and put his arm around her.

"Why, my darling, how you are trembling! What a compassionate little creature you are, to be sure!"

"Yes," with a shaky laugh. "It is a hateful story! Let me tell you the rest—quickly! I hear the carriage coming around."

"Well, dear?"

He spoke soothingly, as he would to a child. He could feel her slight form quivering.

"Even there he followed her, and persecuted her. He threatened he would expose her. She gave him money, her little jewellery—nought of value she had. One April day she went to London. There her baby was born. Only yesterday I learned that she was dead."

Seven! It tinkled musically from the little malachite clock on the mantel.

They should be on their way. It was so abominably rude to keep dinner waiting.

He moved uneasily. She noticed the motion.

"And now," she cried, leaning forward and

laying both her sparkling, clasped hands on his breast, "now my petition! I want to bring her little one down here, and have some good woman—Granny Morris, say—take care of him and love him. May I?"

He laughed, took her face between his palms, and kissed the hot cheek.

"Of course! What may you not do? My tender-hearted little Lillian!"

Ten minutes later, rolling away through the frosty, starlit night, he asked her, carelessly,—

"When did that poor girl die?"

And she answered,—

"When Marguerite did—last September."

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY CLOTILDE RAYNE.

"Half of her exquisite face in the shade,
Which o'er it the screen in her soft hand flings,
In the glows her hair in its odorous braid,
In the firelight are sparkling her rings."

—Owen Meredith.

"Oh, relent, Lady Iva!"

But Lady Iva, looking at Lionel with sweet, remorseless eyes over her fire-screen of peacock feathers, shook her golden head.

"I'm afraid there is no hope. Mamma's sister died so lately, she would not think of going."

"Going where, Iva?" queried a gay voice.

Down the wide, old stairs came floating a slim, little, dark-robed figure.

"We were talking of the Braceborough ball, mamma."

"And why should you not go, dear?"

"That is what I say, Lady Romaine," broke in the young fellow, exultant at having found an ally. "I'm sure a chaperon would be very easily secured."

"Of course. You certainly must go, Iva. Ah, here is Harold! We will appeal to him."

Without, the winter night was closing in. Up from the hollow deer-park, the dusky shadows came shouldering each other. The brooding dusk was full of the prophecy of coming snow.

But here, in the magnificent baronial hall of the Romaines—a hall through which one might drive a coach-and-four, and which, however, gave one no idea of gauntness for all its lofty space—here was the warmth of a huge fire—here the rosy glow of Moorish lamps—here the luxurious, wavering light—here the rustle of silken gowns—here the murmurous sound of voices, "low with fashion, not with feeling"—here, too, "elastic laughter sweet."

For, though living in retirement, as was the Countess, because of her recent bereavement, already had the princely home over which she had come to preside resumed its rightful place as social authority and rendezvous.

"Such a dear little thing!" as Mrs. Trendworth said to the Dowager Duchess of Carlisle, when she happened to mention the new lady of the Castle—"such a dear, unassuming little thing! A perfect lady, I assure you; a delightful acquisition. She comes of a very good family, too. It is a comfort to think she is a person we can know for her own sake. The Woodvilles have extremely blue blood in their veins, you know. And she is such an innocent child—not much older than his daughter!"

And so they all called on the dear little thing, and she charmed and flattered them with her youth and beauty and winning ways and uplifted grey eyes.

Soon it became an understood thing that those who were at the village, or out riding or driving, should drop in at Silverdale Castle about five o'clock.

Then were the ladies sure to be at home; then was the fire in the ribbed-roof hall most ruddy; then of luxurious depth looked the rug-covered chairs and divans; then on the round table of carved and polished bog-oak, brightly glittered the silver tea-service; and then arose the fragment steam of Pekoe and Sou-

chong tea; then talk grew more rapid, laughter louder, mingling with both the dainty clink of rare old china.

It was all very delightful—the elegance, the æstheticism, the mild exhilaration and informality.

Young Lionel got into the habit of coming in almost daily; the Dallas girls often walked over; Mrs. Trendworth could not resist "just looking in;" and the officers from the barracks at Rothlyn, in braided fatigue uniforms and stiff caps, came riding up the avenue about the hour for kettledrum.

And just now there was quite a gay semi-circle around the blazing fire. The talk had turned on the coming Christmas.

"We are going to be very quiet this year," Mary Dallas said. "There are only three or four old friends coming to us."

"Oh, I am going to have a houseful!" Mrs. Trendworth cried.

She was a widow, fat, fair, and fully fifty. She had strongly-marked features, grey hair, worn Pompadour, and a high colour. She dressed richly, entertained lavishly, enjoyed the society of young people, and held that a good laugh added a year to one's life.

"You always have," said Lionel.

"Who are they?" asked Jimmie Talbot.

He was a slender, brown-skinned, curly-headed and moustacheless young fellow.

She looked down on him as he lay stretched on the floor at the feet of Nora Dallas.

"Well, Gay Dairly is coming, and Priscilla Murray (only sixteen, and pretty as a picture, Jimmie), and a German scientist, with an unpronounceable name, a friend of my brother's, and Sir Oswald Herold and Lady Clotilde Rayne, and —"

But the Countess of Silverdale heard no more. Not one word of the widow's cheery chatter reached her ear after that.

Lady Clotilde Rayne! It was the name—the very name.

Only once before had she heard it spoken; then it had burned into her heart and soul, and brain, with searing force.

"Oh, he has, gone sure enough! When he comes back he will marry his cousin. She is very wealthy, and dead struck on him. Her name is Lady Clotilde Rayne."

That most miserable day, that most wretched hour, when she had first heard that name spoken. How strange to hear it again! Now she was safe in the home of a good and honoured gentleman; now she was secure, respected, loved, happy, beyond calumny and above reproach.

But once more she heard it.

And she, Lady Clotilde Rayne, was coming down to her neighbours', and he, Sir Geoffrey Damyn, to the glow of her own hearth and the shelter of her own roof-tree.

"Good heavens!" she murmured to herself, with a little, weary sigh. What a small place the world is, anyway! We leave a person in Hong Kong and meet him in Hyde Park. A person—a ghost, rather—out of our dead and buried past sits down to dinner with us."

How she dreaded meeting him! He had never seen Lillian; his astonishment would be overwhelming. She had told him of the marvellous likeness between herself and her sister. But in spite of all she knew how stunned he would be. And how would he act at first sight of her? As one dismayed? And what emotion would really sway him—remorse, fear of exposure, or only a reckless indifference?

"Dreaming?"

She started violently at the touch of her husband's hand on her shoulder.

"Yes," with a nervous laugh. "I really believe I was. And here is Jimmie, waiting to say good-bye."

She turned graciously to the young man, standing cap in hand, beside her chair.

"Yes. I said good-night twice, Lady Romaine, and you would not even look at me."

She rose, her piquant face bright and smiling.

"Indeed, I beg your pardon, Jimmie. You don't think I would purposely neglect you?"

The lad shook his curly head with wise deliberation.

"Perhaps not, and yet my heart misgives me!" he avowed with mock tragic emphasis. "As I stood here, forgotten and alone, I said to myself, 'In her reverie you have no place,' said alas:"

"I am only a poor poet made for singing at her casement,

Like the thrushes or the finches, while she thought of other things!"

"Bravo, Jimmie!" cried Iva's sweet, laughing voice.

They were all rising, going. Gay adieus were spoken, the massive doors opened, clanged.

A thought struck the Countess. It had thrilled her all day long. Just for the last hour had it slumbered.

She went swiftly upstairs to her own little nest of a dressing-room, and rang the bell.

CHAPTER XV.

SHE could never claim him, no. But she would do so much for him—would be so fond and careful of him. And if the Earl should come to love him, too, and perhaps some day adopt him!

The dream was bright.

Her maid appeared.

"I thought you would return this evening. You brought the child?"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"He is with Granny Morris?"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"How did you find him? What were his surroundings?"

"Poor and dingy and dirty, my lady."

"Is he a fine child?"

"That he is—a bonnie little laddie. He doesn't look over-strong, but he has the loveliest black eyes one could see, and hair as golden as Lady Iva's own."

"Ah, that will do! You may go, Jane. I shall not need you for an hour yet."

The door closed. Her ladyship shivered in the downy depths of her chair. She drew her breath with a hard sob.

So he had told the truth! The resemblance must be very marked. Black eyes and yellow hair. It was the rare combination of the two which had made Sir Geoffrey Damyn—plain Captain Damyn then—so handsome in her girlish eyes.

Would others remark it? Surely they must when the guest she dreaded came. Well, the boy would have to be kept quite away from the Castle while he remained. Not that the very faintest idea of the wild truth would ever enter his head, but others might remark the likeness, and it would be unpleasant for her.

As she sat by the fire, her jewelled hands clasped behind her dark head, her slippered feet crossed on the low brass fender, the folds of her dainty tea-gown lying over the russet-rug in "a rippling sweep of satin," there came into her eyes a tenderness, a lovingness, a look of infinite longing.

"My own child!"

Her lips formed the words, though no sound escaped them. He was so near her; and she had thought him dead this year and more. Why, he must be able to say words now, put together little sweet, broken sentences. But there was one word he would not speak. And how, away down in her heart, she longed to hear it!

She sprang to her feet. She must see him before dinner; she would have time if she hurried.

She hastened to the wardrobe, caught up a Persian shawl, flung it over her head and shoulders, whisked her skirt over her arm, unhasped a French window opening on a balcony, passed out, went quickly down the

stairs, and ran along the great shadowy avenue straight as an arrow and fleet as a fawn!

When Lady Silverdale reached the pretty lodge and knocked, she was quite out of breath.

A hobbling step. Granny Morris opened the door, and peered out.

"Who is it?" she demanded.

"I!" the Countess replied, slipping past her and into the little parlour.

The old woman recognised her.

"I did not know your ladyship just at first. Is Jane without?"

"No. I came alone. I just ran down to see the child. Jane told me she brought him here this afternoon. I am very much interested in him. I knew his parents."

"Certainly, my lady!"

But she gave her a keen glance. She was a shrewd old woman, and she did not exactly comprehend this feverish, friendly solicitude for an orphan waif.

She took up a candle and led the way into an adjoining apartment.

The Countess followed her. Her shawl had slipped from her head. Her silken gown rustled as she moved. The lovely face was all aglow with exercise, excitement.

"There he is, your ladyship!"

On a cheap, but daintily immaculate bed, lay a sleeping baby. The clothes had been tossed off. Bare were the rosy limbs. The tiny-featured face on the pillow was flushed. Over the moist brow clustered sunny hair. The lashes lay dark and curling on the pink cheeks. The red lips were half parted.

Slowly the Countess advanced and stood beside the bed. She said no word. She did not even utter a sigh.

But the white-capped old dame regarding her saw the small jewelled hands grip each other in a fierce and straining grasp.

Never, in all her strong, young life, had emotion so mastered her.

Her child—her own child—and she dared not claim him! He must know no mother. She had a son, but she lived childless! Oh, Heaven, the thought was bitter—hard to bear!

Her heart beat furiously. She felt herself growing faint and chilly.

But she gave no outward sign of the fierce struggle which swayed her. Apparently impassive she stood there.

The child stirred uneasily, and opened his eyes. She gave a sudden start.

Ah, Garrett had spoken truly! No need to ask whose child was that. The dimple in the chin, the golden curls, the beautiful black eyes—what a miniature reproduction they were!

"Willie hangy!"

The sweet, lisping voice! He was not half as hungry as she was, she thought, with a pang.

She was frightened at the volcanic emotion the sight of the child had aroused. She had not supposed such passionate mother-love lay dormant in her heart. She dare not trust herself to stay longer.

"He is a pretty child. Take good care of him," she said, with an indolent smile.

But the kiss she pressed on the baby brow was very tender.

Thrusting a gold piece in the old woman's wrinkled hand, she hurried out—home.

She had just gained her boudoir, flung off her wrap, when her husband entered.

"Where have you been, Lillian? We've been searching everywhere for you. Our guest has arrived. Sir Geoffrey Damyn is in the drawing-room."

CHAPTER XVI.

So he had come at last! He was plain Captain Damyn in the old days—that was before he had fallen heir to a baronetcy—Sir Geoffrey Damyn now.

"Oh!" she said, softly. "When did he arrive?"

"Soon after the others went. He drove in by the western lodge. Why, there is the first bell. You will barely have time to dress for dinner, love. Shall I ring for Jane?"

There were others coming this evening—the Rector, a young officer from Rothlyn, and a Mrs. Holdstrom and her daughter.

Their presence would be a relief; but she did so dread the first meeting. If it were only over!

"Oh, it never takes me long to dress!" she answered, haughtily. "I shall be down in ten minutes. Here is Jane—now go!"

For just a minute he made no motion to obey her smiling, imperative dismissal.

He stood looking at her with an abstracted, vaguely-troubled face.

How oddly Lillian had changed! In what particular—that he could not have told. But now and then it struck him with a queer sense of pain that he did not love his wife as passionately as he loved the girl he wooed on New Year's morning, in the bright breakfast-room of the Honour.

He shook himself impatiently, turned, went out.

If his affection was less fervent than it had been in the early days of his wedded life, the shame was his.

She was all that was sweet and fair and noble.

In the drawing-room Iva and Sir Geoffrey stood and chatted gaily.

He was telling her of mutual friends whom he had met abroad, and many mirthful reminiscences were cropping up with the mention of their names.

"It makes one feel the age of Methuselah, this looking backward," he said. "Why, you were just a little girl when last I saw you?"

"I recollect. It was class-day at Harrow. I was there with my mother's people."

"The Mordants—yes. You were very young when your mother died?"

"A mere baby—yes. But I have a new mother now, you know. She is not much older than I."

"Yes, I heard about the Earl's marriage. His wife was a Woodville, was she not?"

His voice had become serious, almost sad. Iva glanced up.

A fine looking man, whose age was somewhere in the thirties, this Sir Geoffrey Damyn. His face was pale, delicate-featured, aristocratic. The wavy hair was of brownish gold; the eyes were black, and regarded you directly, if very gravely.

"Yes. Her sister died a couple of months ago, so we are very quiet this year."

His lips closed firmly under his fair moustache.

"You mean Miss Marguerite Woodville?"

"Yes."

He looked at her with curiously gloomy eyes.

"I heard of that," he said. A silence fell upon them.

"I think we are going to have snow," Iva said, walking toward the window.

A very stately, beautiful girl, this daughter of Lord Silverdale, Geoffrey Damyn decided.

Had she a lover? he wondered. It would not be long before all the young gallants of the county would be at her feet. Well, if one could judge the soul by looking in through the eyes, its wonderful windows, he would be a happy man who would win her—a happy and a proud man.

Pshaw! What business was it of his, after all?

He passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

He had had his dream of love. Sweet it was while it lasted. Well, it was over and done with now.

He walked up the room to where Iva stood at the window. It was hard to keep inactive, with the moment of his meeting with the Countess so near. It was ridiculous that he should be nervous, he told himself, angrily.

He began to wish he had never consented to come here. Would she be very like Marguerite

—poor Marguerite? He had heard the resemblance between the Woodville sisters was striking, but he had never seen Lillian.

"Yes. There are a few people coming to dinner this evening. It is beginning to snow. I was a wise prophet—see!"

She had pushed back the glowing curtains of plush and lace, and was leaning forward, looking out.

Sir Geoffrey Damyn bent his blonde head toward the pane. Against the sheet of plate glass the first great feathery flakes fluttered softly.

"Oh, Heaven!"

The lady of the Castle, entering, put her hand to her heart as though with a spasm of sudden pain.

The words were not audible; her lips had barely formed them.

She had nerved herself—yes, she had even drank half a glass of brandy to induce courage, composure.

But it was a shock all the same, the sight of those two standing side by side in the bay window, the fair heads so close together. It was many a long day since she had fancied she loved him; but something very like jealousy, a hot, contracting, miserable pang, flashed through her.

Rob-a-dub-dub-dub!

There was the knocker; the Rector, probably. She must get the meeting over at once.

She went on up the room. Iva heard the light step.

"Ah, here is mamma at last!" she cried. "Sir Geoffrey Damyn, my mother the Countess of Silverdale."

Resolutely he had turned his high-bred face to the slender, little figure; now he looked at her.

"Marguerite!"

Such a wild, startled cry as it was!

He had fallen back a step and was staring at her. He was white as death. His up-flung hands were shaking.

But my lady, self-possessed to the very tips of her snowy, jewelled fingers, just bowed graciously and regarded her thunder-struck guest with eyes of calm and questioning surprise.

"You remark the resemblance, Sir Geoffrey, to my poor sister, whom I believe you knew. It is not the first time a stranger has been startled by our likeness. You are very welcome to the Castle. And now will you pardon me? Here are our other guests."

And with serene dignity, she turned to greet those just entering with Harold.

Damyn's hands fell to his sides. He turned his pale face to Iva.

"I am afraid I have offended her ladyship, but the shock was overwhelming. I knew Marguerite Woodville; I could have sworn it was she who stood before me. Such a resemblance staggers comprehension!"

Iva drew a relieved breath. She had been vaguely dismayed by his outburst.

"They were wonderfully alike, everyone says. Ah, Mrs. Holdstrom! Did you bring the snow with you? I am glad to see you, Millie! Allow me to make known to you Sir Geoffrey Damyn."

And Sir Geoffrey Damyn, bowing low and uttering the light platitudes of society, felt that he had come face to face with a ghost this evening in the brilliant drawing-room of Silverdale Castle.

CHAPTER XVII.

"The little darling!" Iva cried. She was down on her knees in the prim lodge kitchen, playing "peep" with the baby.

Between them was the chintz covered arm-chair dear to the heart of Granny Morris.

When the wee yellow-haired laddie peered cautiously out on one side, and the girl flashed her lovely face on him from the other, what a merry, mingled shout went up to the brown rafters, where hung a goodly store of plump, reddish hams and "streaky" bacon.

It was the morning after the arrival of Sir Geoffrey Damyn—a most delightful morning, too—for

"The snow had begun in the gloaming,
And basily all the night
Had been heaping field and highway
With a silence pure and white."

The fields, the dells, the curving avenues, all lay in the sparkling December sunshine dazzling and fair to see.

The wide hedges were capped with pearl. Every twig on every tree was outlined as with a pencil of light; and the sky was blue as turquoise, and the air invigorating and sweet.

"Peep, Willie!"

"Peep!" echoed Willie, darting toward his comrade, and suddenly sitting down without the slightest intention of doing so.

Very bright the little kitchen looked, with its gay knitted mats on the white floor; its row of shining utensils reflecting the sunshine; its diamond-latticed window, across the lower part of which hung an immaculate Swiss curtain; its big blooming geranium and pot of gold-flowered musk on the wide ledge; its fire in the old-fashioned cavern of a fireplace, above which, from an iron crane, a tea-kettle hung; its rush-bottomed chairs; its dresser, with its even rows of blue plates and mugs. And old Granny Morris herself, sitting by the hearth, spectacled, white-capped and white-aproned, her cat in her lap and her knitting-needles between her fingers, gave the last requisite touch to the quaint and homely picture.

"Poor Willie!"

Lady Iva drew the little fellow to her, and kissed the lips which were beginning to quiver ominously at the corners.

And then as, consoled, he sat playing with her watch-chain, she looked up at Granny Morris with her pretty brows wrinkling in perplexity.

"Did you ever, granny—ever see any one whom Willie looks like?"

The old woman gave her a quick glance over her glasses.

"Yes, dearie."

"When?"

"A good many years ago."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Here?"

"At Silverdale Castle—yes."

"Who was it?"

"A boy who was visiting there with his mother."

"What was his name?"

"Damyn."

"Geoffrey Damyn?"

"I believe so."

"Oh," the girl cried, laughing, "I was right, then! That is the resemblance I saw. But I was wondering if anyone else would notice it. It is very singular."

Mrs. Morris continued her keen scrutiny. But there was nothing in Lady Iva's face but pleasurable interest.

When one has made a discovery of any sort it is agreeable to have someone else approve the same.

"Well, I must be going."

Lady Iva stood up, lifting the little chap in her strong young arms.

"Good-by, Willie!"

He put his "wet little, warm little, mouth" down on hers as she held him laughingly above her.

A few minutes later, sealskin-capped and sauced, she was out in the frosty sunshine and walking briskly into town.

Mrs. Trendworth passed her, driving, and drew up to insist that she ride with her.

But Iva shook her head.

"Not such a lovely day. I would not give up my walk for anything."

She passed a few officers as she turned into the main street of Rothlyn.

They doffed their caps and looked after the erect young figure with a good deal of admiration.

Her shopping over, she came out of the town library. As she stepped across the threshold a gentleman, lounging a few feet away, promptly straightened up and joined her.

"Good-morning, Lady Iva!"

He held out a shapely brown hand.

She nodded, smiled, and gave him her slim fingers for a moment.

"Good morning."

"I don't see your rig."

He was looking up and down the quiet street.

"I walked in."

"Really?"

"Truly."

"It is every foot of four miles."

"Doubtless. But that is no very appalling distance, you know."

"And you are going to walk back?"

She looked up mischievously.

"I cannot very well return otherwise."

He laughed. It seemed very easy to laugh just now. The world was a jolly place after all.

"My road is the same as yours," he avowed.

"But you rode in. I see your horse."

"I must leave him to be sold," he declared, gravely; but his eyes were twinkling.

He called a boy, gave him a shilling to take the animal to the blacksmith's, and then turned to the Earl's daughter.

"Allow me," taking her book.

"But I did not say you might come with me."

She was looking very beautiful, very winsome, her soft cheeks carmined by her rapid walk, her shining eyes the deep, rich blue of "violets in shady spots."

"You could not be so cruel as to say I should not? It is not in your nature—such heartlessness."

"Is it not?" she queried, lightly. "Ah, you do not know me!"

But she was walking on beside him.

"Don't be too sure of that," in a voice that was earnest and thrilling.

Over the bridge spanning the narrow stream, out of town they went.

The snow was deep for Sussex, but they were both good pedestrians.

"And how about the ball?" Lionel asked, breaking the rather embarrassing silence which had fallen upon them.

"I am going."

His handsome, dark face brightened wonderfully.

"That is good news. And will you, Lady Iva, save the first dance for me?"

She flashed him a smile.

"I will"—and then, when he would have broken out in expressions of gratitude—"I will—think about it."

"Lady Iva!"

"Mr. Lionel!"

"You can be cruel, after all."

The proud, crimson lips drooped like those of a sorrowful child.

"Why? Because I said I would think about it? Well, you are complimentary! Would you prefer I should refuse to consider it?"

The young fellow wheeled toward her protestingly.

"Now, you know I don't—couldn't mean that."

"How am I cruel, then?"

"Oh, tormenting Lady Iva!"

"In not saying yes at once!" he burst out.

A smile came dimpling around the lovely mouth. It was sternly banished.

"You would not value such a promise. You would think it was too lightly won."

"Not I," he insisted, strenuously. "Try me and see."

But very dubiously Lady Iva shook her head. She did not say a word.

For fully a hundred feet they walked on in silence. Then she looked up brightly at her escort.

"Sir Geoffrey Damyn arrived at the Castle last night."

"Did he?" sulkily.

Lady Iva turned away her face a moment. It was quite serious when she looked again at her companion.

"Yes. He is very handsome."

"Is he?"

Such a dismal voice!

"Very!" with emphasis.

And then, after a slight pause. "He, too, is going to the Braceborough ball."

Lionel's eyes flashed.

"And you, I suppose, are reserving the first dance for him?"

Her innocent, violet-black eyes were upraised to his.

"Why should I do that?"

"Oh, I don't know!" morosely, almost roughly, "unless you think it would anger me."

Lady Iva drew herself up.

"And what difference," she demanded, coolly and quietly, "does it make to me whether you choose to be angered or not?"

He felt as if he had been drunched with cold water.

"Oh, not any, of course!" he avowed, dreadfully apologetic.

The remainder of their walk was rather dull. Now and then a smile came lurking in Iva's dimples, but Lionel, looking frowningly ahead, did not see it.

When they reached the entrance to the demesne she turned and held out her hand.

"Good-bye! What a charming walk we've had! Shant we see you at kettledrum?" she asked, cordially.

The poor fellow stared at her as he released her hand.

"I—I don't think so."

"Oh, yes, come if you can; and you can if you will. I want to talk about the ball. You ought to be interested in that, as I have promised to save the first and the last dance for you. Good-bye!"

(To be continued.)

It is a great and noble thing to cover the blemishes and to excuse the failings of a friend; to draw a curtain before his stains, and to display his perfections; to bury his weaknesses in silence, but to proclaim his virtues upon the housetop.

ONE of the institutions of Cassel, in northern Germany, is a girls' school, founded by a literary woman, daughter of a former burgomaster, Fraulein Marie Calm. The school is intended specially for the class of girls, above the peasant, who do not wish to become teachers—a profession that is everywhere over-crowded. It gives to about three hundred pupils a complete training in sewing of all kinds, from the making of a towel to the finish of an elegant dress or bonnet, and turns them out complete seamstresses, embroiderers, dressmakers and milliners. The graduating test is the submission of a complete set of work, including a specimen of every description of under and outer wear. These sets are sold, and the worker receives the money. The school graduates about forty girls every year; and though Fraulein Calm died last year most unexpectedly, she had secured permanent buildings, and placed it on such a foundation, with the help of other intelligent women, as secures its continuance. In fact, it has become a model for other schools throughout Germany. Like Frau Naprstek, Fraulein Calm was not a rich woman. Her mother and herself lived in their own pleasant little home, supported mainly by her busy pen. Her school was the result of effort made first in a very small and inexpensive way, which grew into importance as its practical character was developed, and received the substantial recognition of the town, as well as of the people.

THE NEW MOON.

—o—

OUTLINED against the darkling blue,
The little silver crescent hung;
Upon the serene summer air
The flowers their fragrance flung.

"Now make a wish," said Lillian,
"For know you not, whatever boon
That of the new moon you may ask,
It will be granted soon?"

"O'er my right shoulder, I can see
The silver gleam: good-luck be mine,
My wish I'll make quite secretly,
That you may not divine."

He smiled upon her, as they stood
Beside the casement opened wide.
"I've made my wish," said he: "it is
That you may be my bride."

Lifting up her fair sweet face,
She looked at him with mock surprise.
"Why, that is what I wished!" she said,
The love-light in her eyes.

Ah, little moon—"was thus you brought
Together loving hearts and true.
They might have drifted far apart,
Had it not been for you.

N. T. G.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

—o—

CHAPTER XLVI.

"WELL! This is a very peculiar sight," exclaimed Mrs. de Ripington, as she came with her usually stealthy step across the hall, and saw the Baronet, Whistler, and James, all gathered round what seemed to be the lifeless body of Brenda Farquhar. "I have yielded to you in every thing, Sir Eric, but my conscience will not allow me to countenance any act of brutality or violence. I hope no bodily injury has befallen Miss Farquhar!"

"I don't know if your conscience will approve of a fall downstairs," said Sir Eric, scornfully. "That is all that has happened. For Heaven's sake," his voice changing to a tone of the acutest anxiety, "come here, and tell me that she hasn't broken her spine, or done anything awful!"

There was a solemn silence whilst Mrs. de Ripington knelt down and peered into the white face, resting so helplessly on Sir Eric's arm.

She raised the body gently, lifted one arm, then the other, softly moved each foot, and, shaking her head gravely, announced it as her belief that the only injury of any consequence was the blow on the left temple, where there was a large black bruise just under the soft brown hair.

Sir Eric drew a deep breath, and stooped his head with an almost irrepressible longing over his refractory ward.

How softly her hair curled on the smooth, white forehead! What pride in the delicately curved nose! What tenderness in the soft, ripe lips!

She had never looked so lovely to him before as now, when her head drooped in helpless abandon on his arm, and a few stray locks of hair hung about the softness of her throat.

He would have kissed her with all the passion of his storm-tossed heart, but some small remnant of proper feeling restrained him from taking such a mean advantage of her helplessness before the prying eyes of his servants.

Mrs. de Ripington tapped him gently on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, Sir Eric, but would it not be prejudicial to your future plans if Miss Farquhar came to herself downstairs?"

"You are right," said Sir Eric, as the wis-

dom of the suggestion struck him forcibly. "She must wake to find herself in her own rooms. I wish to Heaven I could carry her there myself. I could do it so easily if it weren't for my cursed leg."

It went against him sorely to see her handled ever so carefully by the two men, but there was no help for it.

As he followed slowly, grasping the banister tightly, as if his leg hurt him more than usual, his conscience, which had been as torpid as a dormouse in the winter, woke to sudden life.

His own baseness was more apparent to himself than it had ever been before, and he almost gasped at the thought that he had sunk so low.

"I am afraid that you have been very imprudent with that poor, dear leg," murmured the widow's smooth voice, as something like a groan escaped his lips.

He turned upon her savagely.

"Whatever I have done or not done is my own concern. I did not ask you here to look after me."

Her lemon-coloured face flushed a dusky red, and she shot a vindictive glance at him from under her heavy lids.

"I believe you asked me here to be Miss Farquhar's chaperon; but, strange to say, my services are never required when the only gentleman in the house is in her company."

"So long as your services are paid for, I am at a loss to conceive what you have to complain of," he said, haughtily, as he reached the top of the stairs with an effort. "Perhaps you will be so good as to hurry on in front, and see that those men place Miss Farquhar comfortably on the sofa."

"On the bed, I should venture to suggest."

"I said 'sofa,' and I meant it."

"Oh! very well," sourly. "I only spoke as my conscience prompted me," and she hurried on according to the Baronet's orders.

Sir Eric muttered an oath, as he looked after her black figure with a scowl. He could only regard her as a most thoroughly contemptible hypocrite, who never let her conscience speak except to her own advantage, or to make a hit at someone else, and yet he was obliged to acknowledge that he had found her very useful.

When Brenda opened her eyes she was alone with her guardian. She looked round with a deep sigh, but as soon as she saw him she closed them again with a shudder.

Incredible as it seems after the barbarous way in which he had treated her, it cut him to the heart to see that she could not look upon him without a shudder.

He tumbled down on his knees by her side, and clasped his hands in passionate entreaty.

"Forgive me, Bren!"

"Why am I lying here? What has happened?" she asked, looking up with an air of bewilderment.

"You've had a fall—a terrible fall! I thought you had gone from me for ever!"

"Oh, why didn't I die?" she cried, in bitter regret. "Why was anyone cruel enough to bring me back to life—and you?"

"Bren, I've been a brute. I know it; but upon my honour, I'll be good to you for the rest of my days. Only say that you will love me a little!"

"Don't talk of love," wearily; "mine is all gone, buried in his grave," as once again she touched the gold locket with her lips.

A malicious smile lit up his handsome face.

"Kiss it again and again," he said, eagerly. "It's an awful sell for you, poor old girl, but the hair in it is mine!"

"Yours!" starting up and looking him straight in the face with flashing eyes. "You mean to say you told me a dastardly lie when you said that it was Cyril's?"

"It was a harmless fraud, and if I liked to think you wore a lock of my hair round your neck day and night where's the harm? I got your kisses by a sort of proxy."

"Disgusting!" she cried, as with shaky fingers she untied the ribbon, and flung the locket into the farthest corner of the room. The diamonds flashed as they passed over the Baronet's head, and he followed them gloomily with his eyes. Slowly he rose from his knees, all his softer feelings turned to wormwood and gall by her action.

"It's no use trying to be friends with you," he said, bitterly. "You are as cold-blooded as a frog, and I only wish to Heaven I could do without you."

Brenda scarcely heard him. She was sitting up with both hands clasped to her forehead, trying to collect her thoughts. A new and dazzling possibility had arisen in her mind. What if he had deceived her from the first? What if Whistler's visit to Belgium were nothing more than a blind? What if all her letters were stopped—not out of mere ill nature, but to keep her from hearing the truth, and finding out a long-sustained deception? What if Cyril were alive! Her whole face looked as if she were transfigured with a sudden, radiant glory.

Sir Eric looked at her in speechless surprise, wondering what had happened to cause this change from pale exhaustion to glorified vitality. Presently he moved slowly towards the door, afraid to look on her any longer lest her beauty should soften his heart, and make it impossible for him to carry out his sinister purpose. Also he was conscious that if he wished to prevent any serious mischief happening to his leg, he must rest it completely for the remainder of the day.

Brenda started to her feet.

"Stop!" she cried, imperatively. "I've got something to ask you. You acknowledge that you lied to me about that lock of hair?"

Sir Eric stood still, his face darkening perceptibly.

"How can I tell that you haven't deceived me from the first? Why do you keep back all my letters if there's nothing to hide? Why won't you let me hear a single word from the outer world? Oh! tell me the truth, for Heaven's sake!" her voice failing, her hands clasped on her breast. "You've been as cruel to me as you could be, but I'll forgive you everything if you'll only tell me that Cyril's alive!"

"Are you mad?" edging towards the door. "That blow has turned your brain. Go and lie down, and Mrs. de Ripington shall come and see after you."

"I don't want her. I'm not delirious. Eric, if you are not a fiend incarnate you won't torture me any further!"

He looked at her uneasily as she stood before him, with heaving breast and disordered hair, her beautiful eyes raised to his in the most passionate entreaty, as if she would force the truth from him by the power of her glance.

His own eyes shifted, and his gaze was fixed on the ground. No answer came from his firmly closed lips, as he leant against the wall for support.

"Eric, answer me!" coming forward, and, in her eagerness, laying her hand upon his arm.

She had not touched him voluntarily for many weeks, and her little clinging fingers seemed to thrill him through every fibre of his being.

"As you hope for mercy from our Father in Heaven, tell me, is Cyril alive?"

He suddenly roused himself, and broke forth in a furious passion, his face like a thunder-cloud.

"Get away with your cursed nonsense!" he cried, roughly flinging her from him. "You're enough to drive a fellow mad. Pick up that locket," pointing to it with his stick as it lay on the floor, the diamonds glittering like a lost star. "Kiss it as you did before, or, by George, you shall pay me for the insult!"

"It may lie where it is; it's only value has gone from it," she said, contemptuously.

"I say, kiss it!" his voice raised, his eyes flashing.

"Never again!" her arms folded, her head thrown back.

"You won't? Then the consequences be on your own head!" and the next minute he was gone.

Brenda sat down on the sofa, trembling from head to foot, in a sudden collapse. She had faced her guardian with splendid courage, but it had tried her strength terribly, and her temples were throbbing as if they would burst.

She lay back on the cushions at the head of the sofa, trying in vain to calm her excited brain, for she knew that after such an accident as she had had that day any doctor would say that she ought to be kept quiet.

But how could she be quiet when the thought of the mere possibility of Cyril Farquharson's being alive had set all her nerves quivering with a new life.

Mrs. de Rippington, who came in, followed by Sarah bearing a tray, found her, a little later on, pacing up and down the room with rapid, uncertain steps. The widow gave her a searching look, and said, coldly,—

"I would advise you to lie down instead of pacing up and down like a wild animal. If you do an injury to your head after such a severe fall, remember you will only have yourself to thank."

"Who dares about my head? I believe everyone in this house would be glad to see me a corpse," she said, bitterly.

"Now, there you go too far, miss," exclaimed Sarah, "I'm sure both cook and I would have wished you to have a proper dinner; only Mr. Whistler, he stopped me at the head of the stairs, and took every single thing off the tray but the wine, the bread, and the vegetables."

Brenda's pale face flushed.

"Thank you, Sarah. I've been a prisoner for so long that I have no appetite. I suppose now they wish to starve me."

"A vegetable diet is the best thing for cooling the blood," said Mrs. de Rippington, more hastily than usual. "And now I must leave you for Sir Eric, who is fearfully ill. You must have excited him beyond measure to bring him to such a condition as he is in now."

"He can have no peace of mind whilst he treats me like this. Tell him to do his duty and let me free. That will be the best cure for his complaint," and Brenda turned away.

"Sir Eric is, no doubt, acting from the best of motives," rejoined the widow, raising her eyes to the ceiling as if in the act of invoking a blessing on such a benevolent gentleman.

"I suppose you would say the same if he starved me to death!"

To this there was no answer.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHEN Sir Eric returned to his own rooms he was in a state of mind which was nearly akin to madness. His love for his ward had become a frenzied passion, which he was determined to satisfy at any price, whilst her scorn and contempt tried him beyond endurance. He threw himself down in an arm-chair, and pulled another towards him on which to rest his leg. Then he subsided into a gloomy reverie, from which his valet tried to rouse him by a gentle cough. Having failed in all his efforts to attract his master's attention, he made up his mind to address him.

"May I ask what you wish to be done about the lady who called here to-day?" he asked respectfully.

"Done! What do you mean?" looking at him with heavy eyes.

"Only it might be inconvenient if she called here to-morrow," with a slight cough.

"True. You must find out where she lives, and I'll write her such a letter as will send her out of the county by the next train! Give me my writing things; I'll do it at once. I don't want her or any one to come prying here!"

His pen travelled over the paper at a rapid rate, for it was easy to insult a woman in tolerably polished language. No chivalrous scruples kept him back from saying exactly what he felt; and as his feelings at the moment were as bitter as concentrated gall and worm-wood, the language used was more striking than pleasant.

It was such a letter as no woman with a spark of pride could possibly forgive, and it was calculated to keep the recipient from ever setting her foot inside the doors which were once so wide open to receive her.

But Sir Eric forgot one important point—it was certain to turn a possible friend into the bitterest enemy, and Mrs. Wyndham was a woman who would not scruple to seize the first opportunity that presented itself of revenge.

Strange to say, he had no misgivings on that point, and he sent off his letter with a sense of satisfaction, feeling sure that she would never trouble him with another visit.

It was discovered that she had established herself at the "Fox and Grapes," a fact which caused some surprise, but no uneasiness.

Sir Eric felt certain that she would not stop any longer in such a "poky hole," as he called it, but would probably make the best of her way to the sunny south, where they had first met, under the palms at Monte Carlo.

It was curious to remember how he had once considered her the first object of his desire. No sooner had the fruit fallen into his hand than it lost its value; no sooner had possession become possible than it ceased to be desired.

He could see it plainly now, how his love for his cousin had warred against that other love, and finally triumphed over it.

What an utter fool he had been to try to throw her into Desborough's arms! The base trick he had played on her that night had injured him more in her estimation than anything else; and though he seemed to recover lost ground during the first shock of Cyril's death, there had been no real change in her feelings, as was proved by her passionate rejection of his love; and yet he was determined not to let her go.

Her resistance excited the most combative qualities of his complex nature.

Seclusion from everyone else had done nothing for him. If a horse were too high-couraged, the best method of taking it down was to stint its corn. Weakness of bodily strength would be more likely to break the girl's spirit than anything else. He would try what a touch of starvation would do.

He gave his orders to Whistler, and they were carried out with impeccable exactness by the valet, who conveniently chose to look upon himself as an irresponsible machine in his master's hands.

Mrs. de Rippington pretended to delude herself with the idea that Sir Eric must still be acting from the best of motives; but Sarah did not attempt to deceive herself by such sophistries. To her cold nature food seemed of far greater importance than society; therefore she could stand the poor young lady's being shut up between four walls, but her heart, or some other portion of her body, rebelled at the thought of her being robbed of her dinner.

She confided her sentiments on the subject to Mrs. de Rippington, who told her coldly she was to obey her master's orders without discussing them—a principle that few servants carry out, and which was far beyond the upper housemaid's idea of duty.

She talked the matter over with James, who told her that no doubt the master had the best of objects in view, though his actions seemed rather extraordinary. All they could do was to wait and see what happened. If he seemed to be going too far it would be time to interfere, but not when he had only just started.

Sarah acquiesced, but with sore prickings of conscience.

Sir Eric himself ate very little dinner that

night, and the darkest of clouds seemed to rest on his spirits.

To add to everything disagreeable, the pain in his leg increased to such a dreadful extent that he began to be seriously alarmed about it.

His valet confided his anxiety to Mrs. de Rippington, who jumped directly to the worst conclusions, and proposed sending at once for the doctor.

If anything happened to Sir Eric, she would lose all the money she hoped to make out of her compliance to his wishes.

She therefore took it upon herself to ask if one of the grooms had not better start at once for Dr. Whitehead's; but she was only most rudely snubbed for her officiousness, and Whistler was sworn at for the same cause.

It certainly would be embarrassing to have the doctor in the house, especially when he would have to come to the very next room to Brenda's.

If she chanced to hear his voice outside her door she would be sure to make a great outcry, and the most unpleasant disclosures must follow.

No. Sir Eric dared not risk it, but he had the sense to know that he might suffer from the consequences all his life if his leg were neglected now.

It was no wonder that this knowledge chafed his irritable nature to such a degree that he broke out into violent abuse of everyone who came near him.

Whistler could endure to be sworn at with the utmost equanimity, but he was bent upon having his own way with his master, and, above all things, anxious not to let him slip through his hands.

If the bone had slipped, and the result was a compound fracture, nobody but an experienced doctor could do Sir Eric any good.

Amateur advice, such as he himself could offer, would be worthless, for a practical knowledge of surgery was absolutely necessary.

He even went so far as to propose that a narcotic should be administered to Miss Farquhar, so as to keep her quiet during the doctor's visit; but Sir Eric declared, with an oath, that he would not have that prying fellow Whitehead poking his nose into the house for anything; and as to narcotics, he had no opinion of them—they always made him doubly wide-awake when he wanted to get some sleep.

He lay back on the sofa groaning, his brows drawn together as if by pain. He had drunk a good deal at dinner, in order to keep himself up, and the alcohol was working disastrously on his brain. The window was wide open, and the harvest moon was seen in all its glory, its beams silvering with a flood of radiance the silent park, where the deer were resting—the gardens where the flowers were blooming, with no one to care for them—the old grey mansion with its castellated towers, where generation after generation of the proud race of Farquhar had lived, and loved, and died.

One ray penetrated through the uncurtained window, and gave an unearthly, almost ghastly, beauty to Sir Eric's face.

He looked as if he were dead, and the darkness of brows and lashes, and short, close-cut curls was strangely accentuated.

His eyes were closed; a terrible scowl wrinkled the cold whiteness of his forehead. It looked as if his soul had passed from its earthly tenement in the midst of a fearful struggle.

Even Whistler, the impenetrable, was disagreeably impressed, and though he knew that he would be sworn at if he did, he longed to make a noise in order to rouse his master into sudden movement.

He had his wish the next moment, without any exertion on his own part, for Sir Eric suddenly started up with a gasping cry.

"There—there!" he cried, hoarsely, his eyes, which were nearly starting out of his head, fixed on the moonlit space between the sofa and the window.

"Back! back! Oh, Heaven, he's coming! Don't let him touch me. Keep him off! Keep him off!" his voice rising to a scream, the sweat in large drops standing out on his brow.

Whistler sprang to the bell and rang it again and again, terrified almost out of his wits, feeling desperately inclined to run out of the room, yet chained there against his will.

He stared with wide-open eyes at Sir Eric as he got up from the sofa, and staggered towards a high-backed chair on to which he held with trembling hands.

Whistler could see that he was shuddering from head to foot, as he stood there, with white face, his eyes still fixed on the moon-beam, as if he saw something more than mortal in its ghastly light.

The door opened, and in came Mrs. de Rippington, James and Sarah, all in breathless haste, the urgent ringing of the bell having called them from their different rooms.

They stood huddled together in a heap near the door, overpowered by a sudden, chill dread, such as none of them had ever felt before.

Sir Eric did not seem to be aware of their presence, as he gasped for breath, leaning heavily on the chair.

His whole attention was fixed on something that he saw, or fancied he saw, straight before him; and there was something so strange and inexplicable in that fixed stare at an invisible thing which struck an icy chill to the hearts of the lookers on.

By the tight clench of his fingers on the carved woodwork, by the ghastly expression of his face, it was evident that the master, who too often had seemed neither to fear Heaven nor hell, was struggling against an overpowering dread; and the horror, which they could not understand, spread from him to them as if by an electric wire.

Presently, the strong impetuous nature seemed to break from the bonds which fettered it; and to the still greater horror of those who were watching him, he hurled the most fearful curses at the "thing" which he thought he saw.

Sarah held tight on to James's coat-sleeve, Whistler drew close to Mrs. de Rippington, who held up her head, and tried to seem as if she did not mind it, though her livid face and compressed lips betrayed that her courage had failed her more than she liked to acknowledge.

"Shall I go and get Miss Farquhar to come?" whispered Whistler as steadily as he could, for his teeth were chattering. "She's got a rare amount of pluck, and she's the only one who can manage him."

"Are you mad?" with intense contempt, which seemed out of place under the circumstances. "Once open her door, and she'd be out of the house in a moment. And then, how would you like to face Sir Eric in the morning?"

Whistler said nothing, being at the end of his resources, but stood shivering and shaking, his eyes fixed on his master.

"Yes, you fend!" cried Sir Eric, hoarsely, "Go back to the place you came from. You wanted to do me out of it all, didn't you? but I was too much for you. Come to fetch me, have you?" with a strident laugh. "I'm not ready yet. No, by Heaven! I'm not ready. Curse you—curse you a thousand times!" his voice rising again almost to a scream. "You can't touch me," crouching back as if some deadly thing were coming near him. "Brenda, Brenda! where are you? For Heaven's sake come and save me! I—I can't stand it. Here take that, you fend, and go!" seizing up a large footstool, and hurling it with all his might at the space before him.

It clave the moonbeam in two, then dropped with a crash on to the floor, which was followed by a still louder crash, as Sir Eric lost his balance and fell with an appallingly heavy thud, just where the moonbeams rested on the Turkey carpet. Every movable thing in the room shook, the windows rattled in their

frames; one or two chairs were overturned, and the servants involuntarily shrank up against the door. Whistler and the widow were the first to recover themselves.

The valet advanced slowly towards his master, and raised his head with shaky hands. The face had an ashen look about it, like the greyness of death, and there was a slight white froth about the blue lips.

"Here Sarah, bestir yourself," exclaimed Mrs. de Rippington in a business-like tone, "some water in a basin; and you," turning to Whistler, "undo his shirt collar, and give him room to breathe."

They both obeyed her in a mechanical fashion, but were too much upset to have any hope in their efforts. Whistler shook his head gloomily, and thought his master had slipped through his fingers at last, whilst James and Sarah took this last calamity as a judgment from Heaven, and wondered if they themselves would get off scot-free.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Mrs. WYNDHAM sat in the very best parlour of the "Fox and Grapes." This inn had none of the beauty or picturesque quality of "The Miller's Rest," but it was conveniently situated near the bottom of the straggling High-street of Wilmington, and close to the railway station.

Sir Eric's letter was in Lillian's hand, and her face was flushed with indignation. But after a while the first fury of her anger cooled, and she began to see a reason for the unnecessary insult.

"He insults me in order to stop me from ever coming to the house. Therefore, he must have something to hide—and that something is Brenda Farquhar—I'd bet a thousand francs. But my dear Sir Eric, don't you flatter yourself that you've done with me. I would do my best for the poor girl, for her own sake; but now I've revenge to urge me on, and nothing shall stop me. What's the time?" pulling out a toy watch, the back of which had her monogram set in diamonds. "Half-past eight—not too late to go out for a walk. I'll begin at once."

She rang the bell, told Violette to accompany her, and a few minutes later they set off, leaving a message for the landlady that the lady had a bad headache, and wished for fresh air, and he was not to be alarmed if they happened to be late.

Mrs. Wyndham was sorry to bring Violette with her on such a secret expedition, but in spite of her vaunted courage she dared not face the loneliness of the park by herself.

She explained nothing to her, however, as they made their way over the stile, which was placed in a gap in the palings where the public had a right of way across one corner of the estate.

It was so densely dark under the trees that the two women drew close together in a fright at the sound of a falling leaf or a belated rabbit scampering home to his burrow, or even at the sound of their own footsteps if they happened to tread on some withered ferns which made a rustle against their dresses.

"Oh, *parole d'honneur*, Madame, I can go no farther," and Violette stopped short, having just taken a white cow for a terrible ghost. She leant against the slender stem of a mountain-ash, and looked as if she were going into hysterics.

"Very well," was the calm rejoinder. "It will suit me just as well to leave you here. You can sit down on that stump," pointing to the very one on which Flossie had so often sat with Sir Eric, "and wait till I come back!"

"Wait here alone! Does Madame want me to go mad?" gasped the maid, as if she could scarcely believe her ears.

"Then if you won't wait you must come

on, for I have no time to lose," said her mistress, impatiently, her own courage rising as she remembered the letter which she had in her pocket.

All was still when they reached the gardens of The Towers—still as death. The cold, white moonlight streamed over the beds of tall dahlias and golden calceolarias, and the long, even rows of red geraniums, over the grey facade of the old home of the Farquhars, where the present unworthy representative of the race hid his guilty secret.

There were lights here and there, but most of the bedrooms were dark, as if there were few guests staying in the house.

"You stay here," said Mrs. Wyndham, this time pointing just under the terrace to a seat which was hidden from the house, and yet in the full light of the moon.

Violette obeyed, because she did not dare do anything else; but her curiosity was excited to the utmost, and she determined to keep both eyes and ears wide open.

Lillian walked on briskly, keeping under the terrace wall, so that she might not be seen from the windows.

Every step she took reminded her of the man whom she had so nearly married. Then he had seemed to her as a harbour of refuge for her storm-tossed boat—or a chivalrous, upright, English gentleman, who was ready to receive her with open arms, without asking a question as to the past. Now she considered him as a base, unscrupulous man, with no sense of honour, no thought of anything in life but the reckless fulfilment of every wish.

At one time he was ready to move heaven and earth to win herself; but almost as soon as she was won, his fancy passed on to his ward. She knew that she had treated him badly, so there was some excuse for his faithlessness, but if her suspicions were true as to his treatment of Brenda—the whole county should ring with his infamy.

Still keeping under the terrace, she turned the corner, and looking up eagerly in the direction of Miss Farquhar's bedroom, she saw that the one window which looked out towards the south was lighted up.

Her heart beat fast as she hurried on to the other corner, and stepping back under a drooping willow, raised her eyes again.

Every window belonging to Brenda's suite of rooms was lighted up, which seemed to confirm her suspicions that Sir Eric's ward was there, and not at Brighton; but the windows of the Blue Room were illuminated as well as several others in the same row, and after all those rooms might be filled with anybody whom the Baronet liked to put in them, and not by the young mistress of the house.

Mrs. Wyndham was not a woman to be easily baffled, as her presence in Sir Eric's gardens at that time of night sufficiently proved.

A strange noise, as of a voice speaking rapidly, came through the open window of the Blue Room.

She listened. It was evidently Sir Eric talking under the influence of great excitement, and she was glad of it, for if he were thoroughly occupied he would not be so likely to keep a sharp look-out.

Still the noise sounded uncanny, and her heart beat violently against her ribs, as with cautious footsteps she went softly up the broad white steps on to the terrace. Nobody seemed to be about, but she dared not make a sound to attract Brenda's attention.

She looked round for a stone to throw in at the open window, but the walks were most carefully rolled, and as hard as adamant.

If she gave a little cough she was afraid that Sir Eric would look out and discover her. Yet to go back, having accomplished nothing, was too disappointing to be thought of.

In this predicament, she remembered a gold bangle which she always wore on her wrist.

It was Indian, and of a very peculiar shape, so Brenda was sure to recognise it. If she



[AN ACCUSING CONSCIENCE !]

had only a pencil and a bit of paper she might have sent her a message on it, but she had been foolish enough not to think of either.

She detached the bracelet, and after one loving look at it—for she was very fond of it because of the old memories attached to it—she raised her arm, and flung it with all her might up at the window which was next but one to that of the Blue Room.

It touched the sill, and came down with a clatter on the gravel. Dismayed at the noise it made she picked it up, and looked round to see if it had attracted attention. But just at that moment there was a tremendous crash in the Blue Room, and, taking advantage of it, with great presence of mind she threw the bracelet up again, fearing that it would be her last chance. Thank Heaven! it cleared the sill, and must have penetrated inside the room.

She waited, what seemed to her a long time, though, in reality, only a minute and a half; whilst Brenda, suddenly roused from the sort of dreamless stupor into which she had fallen, started from the sofa, picked up the bracelet, and stared at it with wildly-questioning eyes. She knew it—she had seen it before, but where—where?

Her brain was still confused from the blow on her temple, and she could scarcely collect her thoughts.

She hurried to the window and leant out—still wondering and conjecturing—with a wild thrill of hope in her desolate heart.

Lillian saw her, and recognised her at a glance, principally by the cut of her head and her graceful shoulders. This was the girl whom Paul Desborough loved, and yet she—Lillian Wyndham—was doing her best to save her!

She almost wondered at herself as she stood on tiptoe, and opened her lips to ask one or two questions which she was dying to have answered. At that moment, when the prisoner above and the watcher below would

have given worlds to have two minutes to themselves, an unsteady light appeared at the end of the terrace, and the sound of hurrying footsteps came along the smooth gravel.

Lillian turned and fled, making for the steps with the speed of a hare—and Brenda peered out into the darkness, her hands pressed to her aching temples, her heart beating high with hope—and saw nothing!

But Heaven had not forgotten her—her friends had found her out, and her imprisonment would soon be over!

Soon she would be free, and this horrible time would seem like a nightmare—thank Heaven!

Meanwhile, James Smith came to a standstill close under the window, holding up his lantern and turning it round, so that its light might fall up and down the terrace.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he muttered to himself in perplexity. "I could have taken my dying oath, I could, that I saw a figger standing just where I am myself. If I once get to thinking there's ghosts about the place it's not long before I give up this sort of sentinel business. I'm jiggered if I'd keep it on. There's something queer going on with the master, I expect. I'll just give a look round to see that there's nobody on the premises, and then I'll turn in and have a snack of supper. I'm sure I've earned it."

"Violette, come!" cried Lillian, breathlessly, as soon as she reached the seat where she had left her maid. "We must run down the shrubbery quick as lightning."

Violette took to her heels, and thought she would ask the reason why later on. Her own impulse was never to stop running until she reached the doors of "The Fox and Grapes;" but her mistress's energies soon flagged, and, unaccustomed as she was to such violent exertion, Lillian was glad to lean upon the Frenchwoman's arm when they were clear of the park.

As soon as they reached the inn she wrote two telegrams to be sent off to Belgium as

early as possible, and smiled as she wiped her pen.

"I've checkmated you this time, Sir Eric—and I shall have my revenge!"

(To be continued.)

MINGRELIAN ETIQUETTE.—In the highland regions of the Western Caucasus the manners of the Grusinian mountain-folk are pretty much what they were a quarter of a century ago, when the Russians first came into the country. A Mingrelian "How d'you do?" of the genuine old-fashioned kind is still an elaborate performance that takes no account of time. As in Palestine and elsewhere, Grusinian etiquette requires that salutations shall be exchanged as soon as the parties meeting come within sight of each other, and to leave out the most trivial inquiry relating to the most insignificant member of another's household is accounted extremely bad form; so that a couple of silk-shirted Mingrelian elders—they are particularly fond of silk garments, which they wear without changing until they drop to pieces—will begin a series of bows and bendings when half a mile from each other, and continue them with a running fire of exclamations until they come within hailing distance. Then the inquiries commence. "How is your health?" and "How have you been?" "How is your mother, your wife, and your nurse?"—nurses are very important personages in all Mingrelian households. "How is your overseer, and your yard-master and herdsman?" "Is your favourite horse well? and are your cattle and sheep in good health?" and so on, in a regular diminuendo, ending with the meanest maid-servant and scullion of the person addressed, if the latter be a man of standing or position, and not forgetting even "his honour's dog." When the principals have finished, their attendants proceed as deliberately to exchange similar compliments. Time is of no consequence.



[THE STORY OF A BITTER SORROW.]

NOVELLETTE.]

THE SECRET OF THE GABLE END.

CHAPTER I.

THE snow was coming down still; it had been falling all night, until all around Crome Hall was one vast sheet of spotless white, and still it continued twisting and twining, curvetting and dancing in the frosty air, while the heavy grey clouds overhead spoke of plenty more that had yet to come.

"Never such a winter since 1870," old Thomas said, when opening the shutters of the dining-room which commanded a view of the park-like grounds, and he shivered at their wintry aspect, his bones, for he had little else, rattling within his loose garments that had become two sizes too large for him since they left the hands which had made them. He moved away then, taking no notice of the girl who was making preparations to clean the stove, and who had asked if that had been a very severe one, meaning the winter, the while he kept muttering to himself 1870, repeating the date so frequently that Mary wondered what had come to the old gentleman.

He had been in the family long before she was born, and every new comer amongst the servants looked up to him with almost as much respect as they would to the master himself, and, in fact, more so, for where the one was always present with them the other was scarcely ever visible. Mrs. Grath, the housekeeper, being the only one to whom he opened his lips, with the exception of old Thomas, who waited on him hand and foot, watching over him with the fidelity of a dog.

He had been with his father before him, nursing him, the present Squire, when he was a wee boy in a black velvet dress, with a broad

scarlet sash, staying on after the death of the former, and he had seen the wife he loved so fondly asleep in her last narrow bed.

Master Hugh, as he was called then, was away at the time, but "you will be as true to him as you have been to us," was the trust left to the old servant by his dead mistress; and since then he had ever looked upon Mr. Girenstein as little more than a son and a little less than a god, the while he would as soon have expected to have seen the old gable end of the Hall where the ivy grew removed as himself from the family of which he had become a part.

It was all coming back to his memory now as it always did at this time of the year. As he shuffled along the tessellated floor of the passage which led to the housekeeper's room, "How time flies," and "It seems but yesterday," being sentences which he jerked out as he went along.

Mrs. Grath was standing before the fire when he entered, the while a copper urn was hissing on the table, and a savoury smell pervaded the apartment, which had the effect of bringing Thomas back to the present, and for a short time putting from his mind the events of that disastrous year.

"Good morning, Mrs. Grath," he said, advancing, his bones rattling audibly, owing to the difference of the temperature. "This, is winter, and no mistake."

"Very seasonable, Mr. Cross," was the reply; "but for my part I hate the cold weather, and when I see the lawn all white, as it is now, I always think of that night, now seventeen years ago," and Mrs. Grath shuddered as she replaced the cup she had lifted to her lips.

Thomas did not reply for a moment or two; he was thinking too, and then he raised his withered face, where the wrinkles lay so thick and deep, a moisture gathering over the lustreless eyes.

"Will it always be the same, I wonder, Mrs. Grath?" she said.

"Heaven only knows," was the reply; "sometimes I think no, and then just as I hope for the best something occurs, such as this, for instance, and she looked towards the window, from which nothing was to be seen but the pure white snow, forming a fairly landscape as it rested on branch and bough without.

"The master knows best, of course," Thomas said, after a pause. "But I don't think it was very wise, and Miss Evie coming home too, poor child."

"Well it was a difficult thing to know what to do, and had we been in his place, maybe we should have done the same, and as for the child, she is as ignorant of facts as when she was first left a motherless babe in my arms. The blue room is to be hers, and Mr. Hugh has had it fitted up in Parisian style, I think he called it, not that I understand much of French ways; but that it is a perfect little Paradise there can be no two opinions about it. I wonder what time they will arrive?"

"There are only two trains from London. I expect they'll come by the one reaching Crome at 4.30. Anyway, the carriage shall be sent to the station to the early one as well, so that there be no mistake in the matter," and Thomas, having finished his breakfast, rose as easily as his rheumatic limbs would allow him, and left the room to see that his orders were carried out.

Mrs. Grath only stayed a few minutes after, the paper she usually looked over in the first instance on this occasion being put on one side, the while she gave directions for the table to be cleared as she proceeded to ascend the stairs which led to the rooms above.

It was not the principal staircase ascending from the large entrance hall up which she went, but one from the back part of the house, which led through a baize door studded with brass nails to the same corridor, dividing

the gallery which faced the rooms on either side and looked down on the hall beneath.

They were mostly bed chambers, the reception-rooms being chiefly on the ground-floor, where they opened on to terraces, and ornamental parterres, but those used constantly were on the right, while the left wing, or gable end, as it was styled, were left unoccupied, with the exception of one or two apartments which Mrs. Grath kept for her own use, the others being filled with lumber, and therefore never entered by any one else save the traditional ghost, who was supposed to retain them for its sole accommodation.

But although all the servants shunned that portion of the house as they would the plague, only one housemaid declared she had heard anything, and she holding out that there was somebody singing there one night when she went upstairs to do the bedroom, Mrs. Grath told her she was a fool, and she adhered to such nonsense as that the sooner she left the better. So the next day she packed her boxes, and went, still convinced of the truth of her statement.

It was not to that side that the housekeeper now went, but to the other, where everything had been put in readiness to receive the young lady who was to return home that day, as also Mr. Hugh himself, who had for some time been absent.

A bright fire was burning in the grate of the blue room, so called from the colour of its furniture, which was upholstered in sky-blue satin, the half tester bed with hangings of the same colour over it, similar to those which shaded the window, and divided this room from one smaller fitted as a boudoir.

The prettiest portion of the grounds was visible from here, where the lawn sloped to the edge of a lake, on the other side of which a thick belt of trees formed a tiny forest, all now so picturesque in its garb of spotless snow.

I wonder what she is like, Mrs. Grath was thinking. She was a pretty child, but then, they say, pretty children grow up plain.

But that was not the case with Evie Girenstein, whom the housekeeper could not in her wildest dreams have imagined to have displayed such beauty, for that was what she told Thomas, when a few hours after they were discussing the young lady who had just arrived.

Of course, she scarcely knew them, she was so young when she was sent away, and ten years had left their impression deep on the aged faces of the old servants.

"Surely, Evie, you remember Mrs. Grath, who used to spoil you so terribly that I was obliged for your own sake to withdraw you from being irretrievably ruined?" her father said, laughing, when the housekeeper came up to have just one look, as she stammered out, at the little girl she had so often carried in her arms, and then she blushed, hoping she would not think her too forward.

"No, oh, no!" the girl said, extending a tiny gloved hand. "I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Grath, and once more to be at home, though it all seems strange to me just now; but I can recollect, young as I was, everything here in the hall," looking round the while, "and those dreadful men in armour which used to frighten me so, for some one used to tell me they would take me away if I were not good. And it was Thomas, I remember now, who would tell me it was all nonsense, and no one should take me away from him, and then he would carry me off to the housekeeper's room."

"To be petted by the housekeeper herself," her father continued. "But now, Evie, you had better let Mrs. Grath conduct you to your own room, and we will talk over old times later on, when we have had dinner."

"Yes, papa, dear, for I am frightfully hungry; so give directions, please, for my luggage to be taken upstairs, and Matilde will attend me."

The latter sentence was addressed to Mrs. Grath, who till then could not take her eyes

from the fair young face before her, the while Matilde, a little French girl Evie had brought with her, was making preparations to carry out her mistress's instructions, and then they ascended to the room which had been prepared for the youthful heiress.

"Ring the bell, miss, when you are ready," Mrs. Grath said, pointing to one of the old-fashioned bell pulls that hung each side of the fireplace, "and a servant will show you to the drawing-room;" and then she turned with the intention of retracing her steps, when to her surprise Mr. Hugh stood before her.

He had waited in the corridor before going to his own room, until he heard her close the door of Evie's, and then he came forward.

"What do you think of our little girl, Mrs. Grath?" he asked.

"She is very beautiful, Mr. Hugh, reminding me so much of—"

"Her mother," the other finished, for the housekeeper hesitated to complete the sentence.

"Yes, anyone who knew her could fail to see it, and when the county people call, which they are sure to do, they will be seeing it, too. I was going to ask you, don't you think it would be as well not to let any one know my daughter was with me?"

He was leaning against the door sill, towards which he had moved, his hand on the handle of the door itself, that he could open it in an instant, speaking to Mrs. Grath as a son might have done.

"It would be sure to eke out, sir," she answered, "and it is so long ago now, that people are not likely to refer to that, and you could not shut up a bird that had once known liberty, but it would pine away, moping itself to death."

"Well, perhaps you are right, Grath. I will let things take their course. And there?"

The last words caused Mrs. Grath to turn towards the door that led to the gable end, her master's eyes looking in that direction.

"I don't see no difference, sir. A trying night, last night, with the snow thick under the windows; but there is Miss Evie's bell," and apologising for not being able to stay longer she passed on down the staircase leading to the servants' offices.

CHAPTER II.

"WHEN Hugh entered the drawing-room later on Evie was already there. She had thoroughly investigated the apartment, in which were several articles that came back to her remembrance.

Over the chimney-glass hung the portrait of a lady, the eyes apparently watching her every movement as she glided around, and when at last she stopped to look at the lovely face which gazed persistently into her own she became aware of a similarity in their features, and so intent was she on the picture, that she could not avoid a start when her father's hand rested on her shoulder.

It was bare, like to those in the painting, and Hugh could not fail to be impressed by the striking likeness between them.

"Oh! papa, what a lovely face!" Evie said, when she recovered herself.

"And very like your own, Evie," and he looked down from the one to the other; then with a sigh, adding "It was your mother. She was about your age when that was taken."

He moved aside, then leading her to the window, from which he drew back the heavy velvet drapery, that she might look on the broad lands surrounding her beautiful home, "They are all my darling's," he said, "as far as the eye can reach—when I am gone."

"There was such a melancholy in his tone when the last words escaped him that the girl clung closer to his side, making the curtains to fall quickly back.

"Then I never want to call them mine," she said, petulantly.

He smiled sadly, stooping the while to impress a kiss on the upturned face, and then Thomas announced that dinner was served.

As Evie had said, she was hungry, and she did full justice to the repast Mrs. Grath had provided, while she amused her father with anecdotes of her school life, and criticisms of the girls who had been her companions; and notwithstanding the fatigue she was supposed to experience after her journey, it was nearly midnight before she ascended to her room, where Matilde awaited her.

"Poor, dear papa, and I had so much to talk about. I had no idea it was so late," she said, "when she saw how weary the little French girl appeared, I am so sorry to have kept you up so long, Matilde, but why didn't you go to sleep?"

"I did for one little while, Mademoiselle, and then I did hear you play, and I went quite softly to where you can see over in de hall, dat I might hear you better."

"It was so cold, you must have been frozen?"

"Oh, no, Mademoiselle, dere are so much fire here, I no feel cold; an den I hear you sing, but it was English, and me no understand."

Evie looked up through the glass at Matilde, who was unloosing the heavy coils of her golden hair.

"You must have dreamt it," she said, "for I have not sang a note this evening."

"Oh, no, Mademoiselle. I leaned over de harmonica, an' just when you finish, Mrs. Grath, de old lady with black satin and gold chain, come out of one door behind, and she say, 'Matilde, go to your young lady's room. What are you doing here?'"

"It could not have been me, Matilde. I tell you, it must have been one of the servants."

The girl made no reply then, although Evie could see by her countenance that she still maintained that she was right, the while she silently performed the duties required of her; not until she had passed to her own room, which was near her mistress, giving voice to the conviction that it was she, whom she had heard singing, and no one else.

"As if I shouldn't know her voice amongst a thousand!" she said, in her native tongue; and servants, too, just as if they could sing like one who has been taught! Mademoiselle must think me fond!"

But after then there was no further allusion to the singing, and Matilde became quite a favourite in the servants' hall, whenever the other girls could get her to join them, Mrs. Grath being the only one who appeared to harbour a dislike towards her.

A fortnight had passed now since Evie had come to Crome Hall, and although she with her father had returned such calls as had been made, she had entered but little into society, and the first excitement over, she began to feel annoyed in the absence of so little life, almost wishing for a return of the happy schooldays she had spent abroad.

The dark days before Christmas had set in, throwing so deep a gloom over the surroundings that Matilde declared she should destroy herself if something did not turn up to enliven her.

A thaw had followed on the heavy snow that had fallen, making the roads almost impassable, and the grass where the dead leaves lay one quagmire of wet and slush.

"I wish it would freeze! There would, at least, be some skating!" and Evie beat an impatient tattoo on the window-pane as she looked out on the miserable prospect, bemoaning and grumbling at the rain which beat so persistently on the other side.

"Already so tired of Crome Hall?"

It was Mr. Girenstein, who had entered unobserved, and advanced to where his daughter still stood.

She turned round with a start.

"Not of Crome Hall, papa, dear, but the rain; it is so wearying!" and she looked again on the dreary aspect.

"It is dull, my darling!" he said, kindly; "and so I have brought you this to ask you how I shall answer it?" and he held towards her an open letter he had in his hand.

"Oh, papa, dear! a ball! and dear Lady Aubrey, too. You will go, won't you?"

Hugh smiled, looking down at the pretty face, from which all gloom had vanished as if by magic, the blue eyes raised so appealingly to his in anticipation of what his reply would be.

"Would you like very much to go?" he asked.

But she made him no answer further than to throw her arms around his neck, pulling his head down that she might press her soft cheek against his in her excitement, imprinting kiss after kiss on his worn face.

"Oh! so much, dear!" she said.

And so a reply was to be sent, in which Mr. Girenstein accepted with much pleasure the invitation for himself and daughter.

"I shall feel like a fish out of water, I am afraid!" he said, and Evie regarded him in astonishment as to what he meant; and then he added,—

"I have never been to a friend's house for twenty years!"

"Twenty years!" she exclaimed, looking at him in wonder as to how he could have existed in seclusion for what appeared to her such an enormity of time. "And yet," he continued, "three of those were the happiest I ever spent. And then you came, robbing me of all that had made my home a paradise!"

He almost pushed her from him then, a look of intense suffering overspreading his features, but it soon passed.

"My darling, it was not your fault; but there are times when an evil spirit takes possession of me, prevailing over my better nature, and when I recall those happy days, and the misery which followed so quickly on, I rebel against even Heaven!"

He had drawn her towards him again, letting his hand stroke the sunny waves of her yellow hair, the while he looked down on the face so like her mother's, the lines made by his terrible suffering showing but too plainly on his drawn features.

"I am so sorry, dear papa; but you will not love me less, will you?"

He made her no answer; he could not bring his lips to speak a lie, and yet he could not find it in his heart to tell her that love with him was dead, buried in the grave of the past, leaving a memory, and that was all.

So he looked more kindly on the pretty face lifted to his,—

"I have nothing left me now but you, my child."

He made as if to add something else, but stopped suddenly, and then turned aside, but not before Evie had noticed how terribly pale he had become.

"Are you not well, papa, dear?" she asked.

"Only a momentary pain," and he put his hand on his heart. "It catches me here sometimes; but it is gone now. And with a strong effort he mastered those feelings which were betraying him so in the traces they left on his countenance.

"It is fixed for the seventeenth," he said, suddenly referring to the ball a week before Christmas, and just ten days from this. "How about your dress? But there, I suppose you and Matilde can arrange all that, I providing the needful. I should wish it simple though, costly, Evie—one suitable to your years."

"Why, papa, you are quite a connoisseur in dress," she replied, laughing.

In this new excitement the colour had mounted to her temples, her eyes becoming bright and sparkling, adding so much to her beauty that Hugh Girenstein had no fear but that her fresh loveliness would hold its own amid all that would present itself in that garden of girls from which Lady Aubrey would not fail to select her guests.

Her ladyship had been a beauty in her youth, and all around Aubrey Court was beautiful,

she still retaining her love for everything lovely in creation, averring a greater pleasure in the society of the young than of those who had arrived at her own time of life.

"I am growing very old myself," she would say, though she was barely fifty, "and I don't want to be reminded of it by seeing old age in the faces of my friends. My glass tells me quite enough; consequently I look in it as little as I can, and feast my eyes on the youth it is now the turn of others to enjoy, the while it carries my mind back to what mine was."

Nevertheless, mamma with marriageable daughters were ever made welcome at the Court, and many were the surmises as to which flower amongst them would be gathered by Lionel, the tall, young guardsman who called her ladyship mother.

He was home on leave now, and it was on the occasion of his attaining his majority that the ball was given.

"How fortunate it is that your birthday did not fall a week later, Lionel," Lady Aubrey said, when, reading the answers to the invitations she had sent out she discovered Mr. Girenstein's amongst the acceptances, her son, the while, with his back to the fire, looking out on the bare trees, on which the snow was commencing to fall, almost as miserable as the prospect before him.

"Why so, mother?" he asked, endeavouring to suppress a yawn.

"Evie Girenstein would not have been amongst our guests."

"Oh! is that all?" and selecting a cigar from his case, he looked at it affectionately, bit the end, and replaced it.

"Is that all?" her ladyship repeated. "And I tell you she is the most lovely girl I have seen for many years."

"Admitted, mother mine, if you say so," he returned, with a smile; but why should the date of my advent affect her movements in that respect?"

"It was the day Hugh Girenstein lost his son, his wife's death following closely on; and, until now, he has never been known to visit since, and I do not believe, even as it is, had it been anyone else, he would have accepted the present invitation; but we are such old friends, your father and he being at 'Christ's' together, and I thought it such a shame he should shut that little girl up as he was doing, so insisted on his lordship writing to him."

"And the pater has succeeded in drawing him out of his shell?" Lionel interrupted.

"On this occasion, yes; and I hope it will only prove the means of his never returning to it. Ridiculous! a man withdrawing himself from all society because trouble—which comes to all in some shape—should have visited him in, may be, a severer form!"

"How old was his son then, mother, when he lost him?"

"A child of three; but it was the death he met with that so affected his father, I believe, and the sorrow which followed on."

"Why? Was he murdered, or what?" Lionel asked.

But before Lady Aubrey could reply, his lordship entered the room to say he had ordered the carriage for two o'clock, and he should like her to accompany him to Worminster, to give her opinion in the selection of some new furniture he intended purchasing, also to give orders respecting the decorations for the ball-room.

"Are you coming, Lionel?" he said, turning to his son.

"I think not, father," and the young officer seated himself on a couch by the fire, feeling it even too much exertion to turn the leaves of the volume he had taken up with the intention of reading.

He wished them a pleasant drive when her ladyship returned ready equipped for the journey; and then, as the wheels grated on the gravel, he took from his pocket the weed he had recently prepared for smoking, throwing himself back in lazy luxuriousness the while for the full enjoyment of the same.

CHAPTER III.

WORMINSTER was a town of no little dimensions, assuming—since a railway had been made from it to the Metropolis—a sense of importance which it lacked before, notwithstanding that it had its Town Hall, Assembly Rooms, Police Station, and all the accessories necessary to the extent of its population.

Every requisite was to be met with at Worminster, the shops equalling those of other places where the streets, though they might be larger and more numerous, could not boast of better.

They now looked to advantage, in their display of Christmas goods, and such fairy fabrics in the way of dress material for which there would be most call during the festive season, and the vacation having already set in, there was quite an influx of the fashionable world to the little town.

Lady Aubrey had with his lordship made their selection at Mapleson's, and the order had been given to the coachman to drive to Swan and Swan, the largest drapery establishment in the place, where her ladyship alighted, and she was in the act of purchasing some velvets when she became aware of a youthful voice desiring to be shown some materials for ball dresses, in close proximity to where she was seated.

"Why, Evie Girenstein!" she exclaimed, turning round, "I thought I could not be mistaken, and where is papa?"

"I left him at the library, where he intends remaining until I have completed my purchases," Evie replied, the while a sense of disappointment passed over her countenance as she added, "I wanted him to come here with me, but he said he knew nothing about women's dress, and Matilde would be far more useful, and really, Lady Aubrey, I know so little how to choose, and think after all I had better leave it to Madame Louise to provide material and all that is requisite. I was never at a ball before, and as to selecting my own dress I know no more about it than a baby."

"Shall I help you?" her ladyship asked kindly, noting that the tears had risen to Evie's pretty eyes.

"Oh! dear Lady Aubrey, I should think it so kind," the girl answered, the cloud vanishing, which had thrown such a gloom over her young face, and when they left the shop orders were given that Evie's carriage should return for her father, the while her ladyship insisted on her entering hers, where Lord Aubrey was still seated."

Madame Louise's was the direction given, and the footman had touched his hat, prior to mounting, when a gentleman advanced to the side, and a pair of laughing hazel eyes looked on the occupants within.

"You here, Lionel! I thought you intended remaining at home."

"And so I did, but changed my mind five minutes after, ordered the Black Prince to be saddled, and arrived at Worminster almost as soon as your ladyship," and he laughed.

"You are incorrigible," his mother smiled, a reflection of the saucy smile which played beneath his tawny moustache, and then she introduced him to her young companion.

He raised his hat, then held out his hand to Evie, who placed her within it, whilst a rose blush suffused her face, mounting to her temples.

"I am so glad to have met you, Miss Girenstein," he said. "Lady Aubrey has spoken of you so often, that I feel we are quite old friends."

But Evie only blushed the more, smiling the while, and Lionel thinking how sweetly innocent and pretty she looked, when his lordship reminding them that it was growing late, and his horses, for which he had a great consideration if they had not, were catching cold, they moved on, Lionel saying he would be at the Court as soon as they were.

Hugh Girenstein was awaiting his daughter at the library where Lady Aubrey's message

been happy," said Lord Desmond. "Perhaps your own husband—"

"My husband died of a broken heart," returned the extraordinary woman. "He wasn't a bad man, as men go, but he was a very stupid one. However, he's been dead those twenty years, and we need not talk of him."

"Eileen," said her father, as they walked home, "do you know I have been lectured on taking care of you?"

"By Mrs. Venn? What a funny woman she is!"

"Then you have spoken to her before?"

"Oh, yes! She tells me such amusing stories, and I think she must have travelled all over the world. Her heart seems set on staying at the lodge. I hope you won't send her away?"

"I can't, my dear," replied Lord Desmond, slowly. "I must grow a great deal richer before I give up fifty pounds a-year to gratify Maude's prejudices."

Miss Desmond would not have felt flattered could she have seen how thoroughly those she had left enjoyed their freedom. Eileen and her father spent their days out-of-doors. Together they made rambles to the haunts of Lord Desmond's youth. They made charming little excursions to Whitby, when they pined for sea breezes, and often spent long afternoons in the woods gathering blackberries, collecting ferns, and, in fact, enjoying themselves much after the manner of grown-up children.

They were careful not to venture on the Vivian estates, feeling that they often presented an appearance which would strike horror into Maude's heart; but, one day, when they were soon expecting their mentor back, they planned an expedition to some cliffs on the road to Whitby. They would go through the woods, picnic in the fields, and come home to a late tea. Lord Desmond, who sketched a little, would take paper and pencils; Eileen, who was making a fernery at Desmondville, went armed with a trowel and a huge basket. There was nothing common or vulgar about the pair, yet certainly they presented a spectacle trying to a young lady's well-regulated mind. Lord Desmond in white trousers, painting jacket, sailor hat, much encumbered with camp stool and easel, luncheon, etc., was not as imposing to look at as most peers of the realm.

Eileen in a plain grey dress, very ancient hat, much resembling in shape a small umbrella, a trowel, a knife, and a huge basket, was as unfashionable-looking as her father; and when the two, fairly tired out, sat down in a shady corner under a hedge, to eat bread-and-cheese, at a distance people might have been forgiven for setting them down as tramps.

That very day there was a great shooting expedition from Vivian Court, and the ladies had promised to meet the sportsmen with lunch; but Lady May cried off from the party after lunch. She declared there was something forlorn in a dozen ladies returning disconsolately back to the house. It was ages since she had been for a good long country walk. She should go home through the woods, and if her cousin thought he had slaughtered enough birds for that day he might accompany her, and tell her all about the preparation for his sister's wedding, which, as she was to be one of the bridesmaids, naturally interested her.

A number of young ladies together would be likely to look ashamed if one of them deliberately told off the most fascinating young man of the party to her own exclusive society, but no one made a jealous observation when the cousins walked off together. The whole world knew that Lady May's escort must marry money, an heiress-bride, or celibacy was his destiny. Then Lady May was the only child of a wealthy Earl; she and her cousin had been allies from childhood. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should marry.

This was probably the opinion of all but the

two most concerned. May Delaval was one of those girls (whose number decreases, alas!) who can be intimate with a young man without thinking of marrying him; and the gentleman in question having played with her in the days when she wore socks and white pinafores, regarded her rather in the light of a sister.

"I am so glad you have come, Basil," began May, "though it's awfully wrong of you to turn up only just now when we expected you weeks ago!"

"I have been at Boulogne with the Ernestoloffs."

"There is not a Miss Ernestoloff, I believe," Basil Courtenay laughed.

"Oh, dear no! only two sons. They are not quite your style, May, but I am fond of the whole family. Alan will take good care of Lucy, and I would recommend Bob to your ladyship but for the fact of his being hopelessly in love already."

"Poor young man! And you stayed in Boulogne to console them?"

"Hardly that. Boulogne's a very amusing place."

"Miss Desmond always speaks of it as though it were a desert, but I forget you've not seen her. Basil, if you fall in love with that girl I'll never forgive you. She is odious."

"Is her name Maude? Has she black hair?"

May clapped her hands.

"Then you know her? How delightful! Basil, I hate that girl. Don't look so shocked, sir. I do, and she has actually got round my mother and his lordship till they think her perfect."

"I wonder if it's the same? A father and two daughters, perfect gentlefolks, but as poor as church mice. No one knew them in Boulogne."

"Then how did you? Of course, it's the same."

"Bob cherished a hopeless attachment (his twentieth) for Miss Desmond, and, to relieve poor Mrs. Ernestoloff's anxiety, I made a few inquiries about them. The strangest thing was the way they disappeared. They had lived in the place fifteen years without a visitor. A strange man called on them, and a few hours after they had left Boulogne."

"There's something stranger still that you should come here just now to find Miss Desmond staying with us, and your uncle and aunt in raptures with her."

"But—"

"The encumbrances, you would say. Well, I can't tell you much about them. I saw the father once, and rather liked them. The younger sister is never seen beyond their own grounds. Mother included her in the invitation, but Miss Desmond preferred to leave her family at home."

"You haven't told me where they live?"

"How stupid of me! He is Lord Desmond now, and they live at Desmondville, which is almost in ruins. They are awfully poor, and my dear mother has taken up Maude, and means to find her a rich husband."

"Poor Bob!"

"Perhaps he'd do if he were rich enough?"

"And I shall see this ayren to-night?"

"Yes, you are just in time. She leaves us next week."

A turn in the path and Lady May came full in view of two persons leisurely discussing their dinner under the shade of a blackberry hedge. An unfriendly breeze blew off the straw hat, and her ladyship, who had quite a gift for remembering faces, at once recognised Lord Desmond.

"Basil," she whispered to her cousin, "there they are, the fair Maude's family. Oh! if she were only here she would be ready to die of dismay!"

But May Delaval had none of Maude's scruples. To her correct costumes and conventional habits were not indispensable. She went up to Lord Desmond as naturally as though she had been in her own drawing-room, and put out her hand.

"I am so glad to meet you! This is my

cousin, Mr. Courtenay. May we sit down and talk?"

There was something touching in Lord Desmond's eyes; he showed no signs of being detected in a strange position. He took Lady May's hand with comely grace, and said, quietly,—

"I should be glad to meet any cousin of yours, but I know Mr. Courtenay already, and owe him a debt of gratitude no words can repay. This is my little girl, Lady May, and he saved her life. We thought his name was Ernestoloff then. Eileen, my darling, thank Mr. Courtenay!"

Eileen blushed crimson. Her hat had fallen off, and her beautiful hair shone like gold in the autumn sunlight. May Delaval understood now why Maude kept her in the background. She might lack Maude's regularity of features, but she was a lovely child. Those dark, violet eyes, with their long lashes above, would have made her face charming. As it was, the clear, open look, the intellect shining in her expression, and the tender, wistful smile, made up a whole few could resist. Maude Desmond might win admiration, but Eileen would charm hearts and keep them.

She put her little hand into Lady May's after she had spoken her simple thanks, and May Delaval felt more taken with her than she had ever been before with any girl at first sight.

"I am sure we shall be friends," she said, impulsively, "but you know I am very angry with you. Why wouldn't you and Lord Desmond come to us?"

"We sent you Maude," said Eileen, prettily evading the question. "Papa and I have have decided that she shall represent us on all social occasions. You see we are not used to visiting, and it would take up all poor Maude's time if she had always to teach us how to behave."

"You are not a bit like her!"

Eileen flushed slightly.

"I know," she said, simply. "I used to fret about it; but you see our lives have been so different. I never could grow into a fashionable young lady."

"Don't try," said May, simply. "You are nicest as you are. Isn't she, Lord Desmond?"

"Don't spoil her, Lady May," said the father, fondly. "She is a little rustic who has spent all her life in a small French town, so that we cannot expect her to be like an English girl."

"Do you know my sister was terribly disappointed at your abrupt departure, Miss Eileen?" said Basil. "She said you vanished like a fairy."

"I wanted to go and thank her before we came away; but Maude said it would only trouble her."

"Lucy would have been so pleased. I must tell her I have seen you. She is going to be married next month!"

"I thought she was engaged. Is it to that tall gentleman with the beard?"

"Yes, Mrs. Ernestoloff's eldest son. They have been in love since they were children!"

"And I am to be her bridesmaid," said Lady May, "Miss Eileen, if I drive over to fetch you will you persuade Lord Desmond to come and spend a long day with us to-morrow?"

Eileen telegraphed a look at her father. She wanted to go, but she had two heavy obstacles—her toilet and Maude. Perhaps long practice had made Lord Desmond very quick to understand her signals, for he at once began to excuse himself.

"I shall be hopelessly offended," persisted May. "Do come, Lord Desmond, and bring your daughter? I see she is fond of ferns, and I have a good many rare ones to show her."

But Basil Courtenay understood the case far better than his cousin.

"I shall tell Miss Desmond you are afraid

of her if you refuse, Miss Eileen, and I am sure she won't like to be thought a tyrant."

"Do come," urged May. "Mother wants to know you. You see you were out the day we came to call."

She gained her end. As a fact she mostly did; and then, when she had taken leave of father and child, she and Basil plunged into a narrow winding path which would lead them into the Vivian grounds.

"She is very pretty; but, Basil, I don't think her sister is kind to her, and Lord Desmond looks weak. If ever it came to an open difference he would not dare to take her part."

"How you jump to conclusions, May! Depend upon it Miss Desmond will find a rich husband for herself, and leave her father and sister to their own devices."

"I hope she won't find one for Eileen?"

"Don't be absurd," said Basil, sharply. "Eileen is a mere child, and Miss Desmond has too much to do for herself to go matchmaking for other people."

Lady May shook her head.

"Men have fallen in love with children before now. If ever a good match offered for that pretty Eileen depend upon it she would be made to accept it."

"The days of imprisonment for refractory daughters are over, May," returned Basil, rather irritably.

Lady Vivian did not seem particularly pleased with her daughter's news. Miss Desmond had obtained a great influence with the Countess, and, therefore, my lady regarded Eileen through her sister's spectacles, and told May with a houseful of guests a hoyden school girl would be a great difficulty. Basil Courtenay, to his cousin's surprise, interposed,—

"I don't think Miss Eileen Desmond ever was at school, and she is certainly no hoyden. My sister Lucy knew her at Boulogne, and was very fond of her. I predict, Aunt May, you will be so too."

Eileen had never in her life spent a day with other people. The kind of toilet required for lunch at an English country house was an enigma to her, but her wardrobe being limited she had little difficulty in making a decision.

Her newest dress was a grey nun's veiling trimmed with velvet. It had been made in London, and fitted well. This, with soft lace at her throat and wrists, was the best array she could muster. Mrs. Ball, the old housekeeper, plaited her hair, and when Lady May drove up in her pony-carriage she found both her guests waiting, and looking very different from the couple she had surprised yesterday.

May Delaval, in point of age, came between the two sisters. She was twenty-two, and in some things quite a woman of the world; but in spite of this she retained much of the girlish enthusiasm and eagerness of early youth.

May was given to take prejudices both for and against people. Having conceived one in favour of Eileen, she was most anxious that her protégée should make a good impression on her mother and the chief guests at Vivian Court.

The Countess and her nephew came forward to greet the new arrivals. Lady Vivian half started as she saw Eileen, and, to her daughter's surprise, bent and kissed her.

"My dear, you are so like my sister who died when I was quite a child. She was my favourite of all the family, and, though it is years ago, I have never forgotten her."

Basil was recommended to do the honours of the conservatory. Lady May went indoors, and the Countess, on Lord Desmond's arm, followed the young couple at a distance.

"You ought to be a happy man!" said the lady. "I never saw anything more charming than your daughters in their different styles."

"They are happy in your praise," he said, simply. "Poor girls, they deserve a brighter future than their father has been able to afford them."

"They are sure to marry," said my lady, frankly. "Indeed, there is a gentleman here who admires Maude intensely. He has not yet spoke definitely but, he seems her shadow, and when he is not with her he is always questioning one about 'Miss Desmond.'"

Lord Desmond smiled. Perhaps in his heart of hearts he would have felt glad to be free from Maude's stern rule.

Eileen and Basil had disappeared through a leafy shrubbery. The Countess and her escort were preparing to follow them when they came face to face with another couple—Maude Desmond, perfect in all her elegant array, leaning on the arm of a grave, middle-aged man, whose stern features melted into a smile at one of her gay sallies.

"Ah!" said the Countess in a whisper, "the very man I was speaking of." Aloud, "Let me introduce you to Lord Desmond, Mr. Goldsmith."

But she was not prepared for the effect of her words. As she pronounced the name of Goldsmith Lord Desmond tottered, and would have fallen but for the aid of the stranger's arm. His face was ashen white. Great drops of sweat stood on his brow. He looked like one smitten with a mortal fear. With quiet command Mr. Goldsmith declared it was but a passing faintness. The patient needed air. If they would stand aside Lord Desmond would soon recover from this momentary attack of giddiness. Then, as soon as he had managed to get the two ladies beyond earshot, he bent over the unhappy man, and whispered,—

"For Heaven's sake, command yourself, my lord! Your secret is safe for me, but you are going the very way to arouse public curiosity."

"Say it again," moaned Lord Desmond, hopelessly. "Do you really mean it?"

"You are perfectly safe for me," repeated Adam Goldsmith; "and I believe no other living creature knows the truth."

(To be continued.)

A DESPERATE DEED.

—3—

CHAPTER XIII.—(continued.)

LILIAN lifted her great shining eyes and looked across at him. She laughed reassuringly, perhaps a little too loudly.

"Oh, she came back, yes, but none ever saw her again as she used to be. A stranger might see no change. We all did. She who before had fairly floated, for she could scarcely keep her feet from dancing, walked wearily and slowly. She, whose laughter had been so ringing and spontaneous, rarely smiled. She had moods. She had grown sullen, excitable, capricious. All the innocence, the glad-heartedness, all 'the wild freshness of morning,' had gone from her for ever."

She had spoken slowly, deliberately, her eyes still gazing downwards as though reading in the fire the story she told.

"And why?"

He was not feigning interest now. He was leaning slightly forward, his elbow on the arm of his chair, his head on his hand.

"This was her story: In London, at her aunt's house, she had met a man—a frank, fine-looking fellow, a captain in a Calcutta regiment. It was a case of love at first sight. He was a captivating, manly, sunny-faced fellow, and she was pretty and impressionable. He was highly-connected, but poor—in fact, in debt. She had money coming to her, dependent on her aunt's approval of the marriage."

"They dare not allow their attachment to become known. When he proposed a secret marriage she—very young and romantic, you must remember—thought it would be delightful in real life as in a novel. The mystery would be enchanting. How loyal her heart

would be to him when 'lovers around her were sighing,' and how they would astonish everyone some day when he had succeeded to the heritage of his expectancy by saying, 'We have been married and faithful all these years!' And she dreamed of a cottage

"Bowered in roses and covered with thatch, After the fun of a runaway match,"

and all that sort of thing, you know—poor little fool!"

She was silent.

The Earl looked at her curiously. How much the relation of the story seemed to affect her! How tremendously in earnest she was!

Well, no wonder. She and this girl she spoke of had probably been dear friends and associates.

But he wished she would hurry. The carriage would soon be at the door.

"Well, she married him, in strictest privacy," the Countess resumed.

She left her place by the fire, came over to her husband's side, and sank down on a low stool beside him.

"She told her aunt she was going to visit a school friend, and she went away to a little, lonely, sea-coast town and lived six weeks with him. Then, fearing detection, she returned to her aunt's house. There, one morning, a man called to see her. It was her husband's servant. He had a box in his hands—a little box. He gave it to her. She opened it. Within were the few notes she had written him, her picture, a flower she had given him, and a ring of her hair hair. She could not speak. She was simply dazed. At last she faltered,—

"My husband?"

"The fellow laughed insultingly.

"I guess you haven't got any. The captain gave me those traps to bring back to you. He's got dead loads of such stuff. He sailed for Calcutta yesterday. When he returns, in a couple of years, he's going to marry his cousin."

"And he mentioned her name—a rich and titled lady—Clotilde Rayne."

"She was crazy. But still she could not believe it. She could only say, stupidly,—

"I was married!"

"And for answer the wretch before her joined his hands, rolled up his eyes, and said,—

"Of course you were! And the minister wore a rig rented for the occasion at two-and-sixpence. And I was the minister!"

"She didn't die. No one ever does when they most long to. She did not even faint. She was afraid of her aunt appearing. She got him to leave by promising to meet him in the park. She did so. He offered to marry her, clothing his proposals in words so insultingly condescending, it is a wonder her rage and scorn did not kill him! Then it was she came back to the Honour."

The Countess paused.

The Earl stooped, and put his arm around her.

"Why, my darling, how you are trembling! What a compassionate little creature you are, to be sure!"

"Yes," with a shaky laugh. "It is a hateful story! Let me tell you the rest—quickly! I hear the carriage coming around."

"Well, dear?"

He spoke soothingly, as he would to a child. He could feel her slight form quivering.

"Even there he followed her, and persecuted her. He threatened he would expose her. She gave him money, her little jewellery—ought of value she had. One April day she went to London. There her baby was born. Only yesterday I learned that she was dead."

Seven! It tinkled musically from the little malachite clock on the mantel.

They should be on their way. It was so abominably rude to keep dinner waiting.

He moved uneasily. She noticed the motion.

"And now," she cried, leaning forward and

laying both her sparkling, clasped hands on his breast, "now my petition! I want to bring her little one down here, and have some good woman—Granny Morris, say—take care of him and love him. May I?"

He laughed, took her face between his palms, and kissed the hot cheek.

"Of course! What may you not do? My tender-hearted little Lillian!"

Ten minutes later, rolling away through the frosty, starlit night, he asked her, carelessly,—

"When did that poor girl die?"

And she answered,—

"When Marguerite died—last September."

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY CLOTILDE RAYNE.

"Half of her exquisite face in the shade,
Which o'er it the screen in her soft hand flings,
In the glows her hair in its odorous braid,
In the firelight are sparkling her rings."
—Owen Meredith.

"Oh, relent, Lady Iva!"

But Lady Iva, looking at Lionel with sweet, remorseless eyes over her fire-screen of peacock feathers, shook her golden head.

"I'm afraid there is no hope. Mamma's sister died so lately, she would not think of going."

"Going where, Iva?" queried a gay voice.

Down the wide, old stairs came floating a slim, little, dark-robed figure.

"We were talking of the Braceborough ball, mamma."

"And why should you not go, dear?"

"That is what I say, Lady Romaine," broke in the young fellow, exultant at having found an ally. "I'm sure a chaperon would be very easily secured."

"Of course. You certainly must go, Iva. Ah, here is Harold! We will appeal to him."

Without, the winter night was closing in. Up from the hollow deer-park, the dusky shadows came shuddering each other. The brooding dusk was full of the prophecy of coming snow.

But here, in the magnificent baronial hall of the Romaines—a hall through which one might drive a coach-and-four, and which, however, gave one no idea of gauntness for all its lofty space—here was the warmth of a huge fire—here the rosy glow of Moorish lamps—here the luxurious, wavering light—here the rustle of silken gowns—here the murmurous sound of voices, "low with fashion, not with feeling"—here, too, "elastic laughter sweet."

For, though living in retirement, as was the Countess, because of her recent bereavement, already had the princely home over which she had come to preside resumed its rightful place as social authority and rendezvous.

"Such a dear little thing!" as Mrs. Trendworth said to the Dowager Duchess of Carlisle, when she happened to mention the new lady of the Castle—"such a dear, unassuming little thing! A perfect lady, I assure you; a delightful acquisition. She comes of a very good family, too. It is a comfort to think she is a person we can know for her own sake. The Woodvilles have extremely blue blood in their veins, you know. And she is such an innocent child—not much older than his daughter!"

And so they all called on the dear little thing, and she charmed and flattered them with her youth and beauty and winning ways and uplifted grey eyes.

Soon it became an understood thing that those who were at the village, or out riding or driving, should drop in at Silverdale Castle about five o'clock.

Then were the ladies sure to be at home; then was the fire in the ribbed roof hall most ruddy; then of luxurious depth looked the rug-covered chairs and divans; then on the round table of carved and polished bog-oak, brightly glittered the silver tea-service; then arose the fragrant steam of Pekoe and Sou-

chong tea; then talk grew more rapid, laughter louder, mingling with both the dainty clink of rare old china.

It was all very delightful—the elegance, the æstheticism, the mild exhilaration and informality.

Young Lionel got into the habit of coming in almost daily; the Dallas girls often walked over; Mrs. Trendworth could not resist "just looking in;" and the officers from the barracks at Rothlyn, in braided fatigue uniforms and stiff caps, came riding up the avenue about the hour for kettledrum.

And just now there was quite a gay semi-circle around the blazing fire. The talk had turned on the coming Christmas.

"We are going to be very quiet this year," Mary Dallas said. "There are only three or four old friends coming to us."

"Oh, I am going to have a houseful!" Mrs. Trendworth cried.

She was a widow, fat, fair, and fully fifty. She had strongly-marked features, grey hair, worn Pompadour, and a high colour. She dressed richly, entertained lavishly, enjoyed the society of young people, and held that a good laugh added a year to one's life.

"You always have," said Lionel.

"Who are they?" asked Jimmie Talbot.

He was a slender, brown-skinned, curly-headed and mouthacheless young fellow.

She looked down on him as he lay stretched on the floor at the feet of Nora Dallas.

"Well, Guy Dairly is coming, and Priscilla Murray (only sixteen, and pretty as a picture, Jimmie), and a German scientist, with an unpronounceable name, a friend of my brother's, and Sir Oswald Herold and Lady Clotilde Rayne, and —"

But the Countess of Silverdale heard no more. Not one word of the widow's cheery chatter reached her ear after that.

Lady Clotilde Rayne! It was the name—the very name.

Only once before had she heard it spoken; then it had burned into her heart and soul, and brain, with searing force.

"Oh, he has, gone sure enough! When he comes back he will marry his cousin. She is very wealthy, and dead struck on him. Her name is Lady Clotilde Rayne."

That most miserable day, that most wretched hour, when she had first heard that name spoken. How strange to hear it again! Now she was safe in the home of a good and honoured gentleman; now she was secure, respected, loved, happy, beyond calumny and above reproach.

But once more she heard it.

And she, Lady Clotilde Rayne, was coming down to her neighbour's, and he, Sir Geoffrey Damyn, to the glow of her own hearth and the shelter of her own roof-tree.

"Good heavens!" she murmured to herself, with a little, weary sigh. What a small place the world is, anyway! We leave a person in Hong Kong and meet him in Hyde Park. A person—a ghost, rather—out of our dead and buried past sits down to dinner with us."

How she dreaded meeting him! He had never seen Lillian; his astonishment would be overwhelming. She had told him of the marvellous likeness between herself and her sister. But in spite of all she knew how stunned he would be. And how would he act at first sight of her? As one dismayed? And what emotion would really sway him—remorse, fear of exposure, or only a reckless indifference?

"Dreaming?"

She started violently at the touch of her husband's hand on her shoulder.

"Yes," with a nervous laugh. "I really believe I was. And here is Jimmie, waiting to say good-bye."

She turned graciously to the young man, standing cap in hand, beside her chair.

"Yes, I said good-night twice, Lady Romaine, and you would not even look at me."

She rose, her piquant face bright and smiling.

"Indeed, I beg your pardon, Jimmie. You don't think I would purposely neglect you?"

The lad shook his curly head with wise deliberation.

"Perhaps not, and yet my heart misgives me!" he avowed with mock tragic emphasis. "As I stood here, forgotten and alone, I said to myself, 'In her reverie you have no place,' said alas:

"I am only a poor poet made for singing at her casement;

Like the thrushes or the finches, while she thought of other things!"

"Bravo, Jimmie!" cried Iva's sweet, laughing voice.

They were all rising, going. Gay adieux were spoken, the massive doors opened, clanged.

A thought struck the Countess. It had thrilled her all day long. Just for the last hour had it slumbered.

She went swiftly upstairs to her own little nest of a dressing-room, and rang the bell.

CHAPTER XV.

SHE could never claim him, no. But she would do so much for him—would be so fond and careful of him. And if the Earl should come to love him, too, and perhaps some day adopt him!

The dream was bright.

Her maid appeared.

"I thought you would return this evening. You brought the child?"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"He is with Granny Morris?"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"How did you find him? What were his surroundings?"

"Poor and dingy and dirty, my lady."

"Is he a fine child?"

"That he is—a bonnie little laddie. He doesn't look over-strong, but he has the loveliest black eyes one could see, and hair as golden as Lady Iva's own."

"Ah, that will do! You may go, Jane. I shall not need you for an hour yet."

The door closed. Her ladyship shivered in the downy depths of her chair. She drew her breath with a hard sob.

So he had told the truth! The resemblance must be very marked. Black eyes and yellow hair. It was the rare combination of the two which had made Sir Geoffrey Damyn—plain Captain Damyn then—so handsome in her girlish eyes.

Would others remark it? Surely they must when the guest she dreaded came. Well, the boy would have to be kept quite away from the Castle while he remained. Not that the very faintest idea of the wild truth would ever enter his head, but others might remark the likeness, and it would be unpleasant for her.

As she sat by the fire, her jewelled hands clasped behind her dark head, her slipped feet crossed on the low brass fender, the folds of her dainty tea-gown lying over the russet-rug in "a rippling sweep of satin," there came into her eyes a tenderness, a lovingness, a look of infinite longing.

"My own child!"

Her lips formed the words, though no sound escaped them. He was so near her; and she had thought him dead this year and more. Why, he must be able to say words now, put together little sweet, broken sentences. But there was one word he would not speak. And how, away down in her heart, she longed to hear it!

She sprang to her feet. She must see him before dinner; she would have time if she hurried.

She hastened to the wardrobe, caught up a Persian shawl, flung it over her head and shoulders, whisked her skirt over her arm, unhasped a French window opening on a balcony, passed out, went quickly down the

stairs, and ran along the great shadowy avenue straight as an arrow and fleet as a fawn!

When Lady Silverdale reached the pretty lodge and knocked, she was quite out of breath.

A hobbling step. Granny Morris opened the door, and peered out.

"Who is it?" she demanded.

"I!" the Countess replied, slipping past her and into the little parlour.

The old woman recognised her.

"I did not know your ladyship just at first. Is Jane without?"

"No. I came alone. I just ran down to see the child. Jane told me she brought him here this afternoon. I am very much interested in him. I knew his parents."

"Certainly, my lady!"

But she gave her a keen glance. She was a shrewd old woman, and she did not exactly comprehend this feverish, friendly solicitude for an orphan waif.

She took up a candle and led the way into an adjoining apartment.

The Countess followed her. Her shawl had slipped from her head. Her silken gown rustled as she moved. The lovely face was all aglow with exercise, excitement.

"There he is, your ladyship!"

On a cheap, but daintily immaculate bed, lay a sleeping baby. The clothes had been tossed off. Bare were the rosy limbs. The tiny featured face on the pillow was flushed. Over the moist brow clustered sunny hair. The lashes lay dark and curling on the pink cheeks. The red lips were half parted.

Slowly the Countess advanced and stood beside the bed. She said no word. She did not even utter a sigh.

But the white-capped, old dame regarding her saw the small jewelled hands grip each other in a fierce and straining grasp.

Never, in all her strong, young life, had emotion so mastered her.

Her child—her own child—and she dared not claim him! He must know no mother. She had a son, but she lived childless! Oh, Heaven, the thought was bitter—hard to bear!

Her heart beat furiously. She felt herself growing faint and chilly.

But she gave no outward sign of the fierce struggle which swayed her. Apparently impassive she stood there.

The child stirred uneasily, and opened his eyes. She gave a sudden start.

Ah, Garrett had spoken truly! No need to ask whose child was that. The dimple in the chin, the golden curls, the beautiful black eyes—what a miniature reproduction they were!

"Willie hungry!"

The sweet, lisping voice! He was not half as hungry as she was, she thought, with a pang.

She was frightened at the volcanic emotion the sight of the child had aroused. She had not supposed such passionate mother-love lay dormant in her heart. She dare not trust herself to stay longer.

"He is a pretty child. Take good care of him," she said, with an indolent smile.

But the kiss she pressed on the baby brow was very tender.

Thrusting a gold piece in the old woman's wrinkled hand, she hurried out—home.

She had just gained her boudoir, flung off her wrap, when her husband entered.

"Where have you been, Lillian? We've been searching everywhere for you. Our guest has arrived. Sir Geoffrey Damyn is in the drawing-room."

CHAPTER XVI.

So he had come at last! He was plain Captain Damyn in the old days—that was before he had fallen heir to a baronetcy—Sir Geoffrey Damyn now.

"Oh!" she said, softly. "When did he arrive?"

"Soon after the others went. He drove in by the western lodge. Why, there is the first bell. You will barely have time to dress for dinner, love. Shall I ring for Jane?"

There were others coming this evening—the Rector, a young officer from Rothlyn, and a Mrs. Holdstrom and her daughter.

Their presence would be a relief; but she did so dread the first meeting. If it were only over!

"Oh, it never takes me long to dress!" she answered, haughtily. "I shall be down in ten minutes. Here is Jane—now go!"

For just a minute he made no motion to obey her smiling, imperative dismissal.

He stood looking at her with an abstracted, vaguely-troubled face.

How oddly Lillian had changed! In what particular—that he could not have told. But now and then it struck him with a queer sense of pain that he did not love his wife as passionately as he loved the girl he wooed on New Year's morning, in the bright breakfast-room of the Honour.

He shook himself impatiently, turned, went out.

If his affection was less fervent than it had been in the early days of his wedded life, the shame was his.

She was all that was sweet and fair and noble.

In the drawing-room Iva and Sir Geoffrey stood and chatted gaily.

He was telling her of mutual friends whom he had met abroad, and many mirthful reminiscences were cropping up with the mention of their names.

"It makes one feel the age of Methuselah, this looking backward," he said. "Why, you were just a little girl when last I saw you?"

"I recollect. It was class-day at Harrow. I was there with my mother's people."

"The Mordaunts—yes. You were very young when your mother died?"

"A mere baby—yes. But I have a new mother now, you know. She is not much older than I."

"Yes, I heard about the Earl's marriage. His wife was a Woodville, was she not?"

His voice had become serious, almost sad. Iva glanced up.

A fine looking man, whose age was somewhere in the thirties, this Sir Geoffrey Damyn. His face was pale, delicate-featured, aristocratic. The wavy hair was of brownish gold; the eyes were black, and regarded you directly, if very gravely.

"Yes. Her sister died a couple of months ago, so we are very quiet this year."

His lips closed firmly under his fair moustache.

"You mean Miss Marguerite Woodville?"

"Yes."

He looked at her with curiously gloomy eyes.

"I heard of that," he said. A silence fell upon them.

"I think we are going to have snow," Iva said, looking toward the window.

A very stately, beautiful girl, this daughter of Lord Silverdale, Geoffrey Damyn decided.

Had she a lover? he wondered. It would not be long before all the young gallants of the county would be at her feet. Well, if one could judge the soul by looking in through the eyes, its wonderful windows, he would be a happy man who would win her—a happy and a proud man.

Pshaw! What business was it of his, after all?

He passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

He had had his dream of love. Sweet it was while it lasted. Well, it was over and done with now.

He walked up the room to where Iva stood at the window. It was hard to keep inactive, with the moment of his meeting with the Countess so near. It was ridiculous, that he should be nervous, he told himself, angrily.

He began to wish he had never consented to come here. Would she be very like Marguerite

—poor Marguerite? He had heard the resemblance between the Woodville sisters was striking, but he had never seen Lillian.

"Yes. There are a few people coming to dinner this evening. It is beginning to snow. I was a wise prophet—see!"

She had pushed back the glowing curtains of plush and lace, and was leaning forward, looking out.

Sir Geoffrey Damyn bent his blonde head toward the pane. Against the sheet of plate glass the first great feathery flakes fluttered softly.

"Oh, Heaven!"

The lady of the Castle, entering, put her hand to her heart as though with a spasm of sudden pain.

The words were not audible; her lips had barely formed them.

She had nerved herself—yes, she had even drank half a glass of brandy to induce courage, composure.

But it was a shock all the same, the sight of those two standing side by side in the bay window, the fair heads so close together. It was many a long day since she had fancied she loved him; but something very like jealousy, a hot, contracting, miserable pang, flashed through her.

Rub-a-dub-dub!

There was the knocker; the Rector, probably. She must get the meeting over at once.

She went on up the room. Iva heard the light step.

"Ah, here is mamma at last!" she cried. "Sir Geoffrey Damyn, my mother the Countess of Silverdale."

Resolutely he had turned his high-bred face to the slender, little figure; now he looked at her.

"Marguerite!"

Such a wild, startled cry as it was!

He had fallen back a step and was staring at her. He was white as death. His up-flung hands were shaking.

But my lady, self-possessed to the very tips of her snowy, jewelled fingers, just bowed graciously and regarded her thunderstruck guest with eyes of calm and questioning surprise.

"You remark the resemblance, Sir Geoffrey, to my poor sister, whom I believe you knew. It is not the first time a stranger has been startled by our likeness. You are very welcome to the Castle. And now will you pardon me? Here are our other guests."

And with serene dignity, she turned to greet those just entering with Harold.

Damyn's hands fell to his sides. He turned his pale face to Iva.

"I am afraid I have offended her ladyship, but the shock was overwhelming. I knew Marguerite Woodville; I could have sworn it was she who stood before me. Such a resemblance staggers comprehension!"

Iva drew a relieved breath. She had been vaguely dismayed by his outburst.

"They were wonderfully alike, everyone says. Ah, Mrs. Holdstrom! Did you bring the snow with you? I am glad to see you, Millie! Allow me to make known to you Sir Geoffrey Damyn."

And Sir Geoffrey Damyn, bowing low and uttering the light platitudes of society, felt that he had come face to face with a ghost this evening in the brilliant drawing-room of Silverdale Castle.

CHAPTER XVII.

"The little darling!" Iva cried.

She was down on her knees in the prim lodge kitchen, playing "peep" with the baby.

Between them was the chintz covered arm-chair dear to the heart of Granny Morris.

When the wee yellow-haired laddie peered cautiously out on one side, and the girl flashed her lovely face on him from the other, what a merry, mingled shout went up to the brown rafters, where hung a goodly store of plump, reddish hams and "streaky" bacon.

It was the morning after the arrival of Sir Geoffrey Damyn—a most delightful morning, too—for

"The snow had begun in the gloaming,
And busily all the night
Had been heaping field and highway
With a silence pure and white."

The fields, the dells, the curving avenues, all lay in the sparkling December sunshine dazzling and fair to see.

The wide hedges were capped with pearl. Every twig on every tree was outlined as with a pencil of light; and the sky was blue as turquoise, and the air invigorating and sweet.

"Peep, Willie!"
"Peep!" echoed Willie, darting toward his comrade, and suddenly sitting down without the slightest intention of doing so.

Very bright the little kitchen looked, with its gay knitted mats on the white floor; its row of shining utensils reflecting the sunshine; its diamond-latticed window, across the lower part of which hung an immaculate *S. visa* curtain; its big blooming geranium and pot of gold-flowered musk on the wide ledge; its fire in the old-fashioned cavern of a fireplace, above which, from an iron crane, a tea-kettle hung; its rush-bottomed chairs; its dresser, with its even rows of blue plates and mugs. And old Granny Morris herself, sitting by the hearth, spectacled, white-capped and white-aproned, her cat in her lap and her knitting-needles between her fingers, gave the last requisite touch to the quaint and homely picture.

"Poor Willie!"
Lady Iva drew the little fellow to her, and kissed the lips which were beginning to quiver ominously at the corners.

And then as, consoled, he sat playing with her watch-chain, she looked up at Granny Morris with her pretty brows wrinkling in perplexity.

"Did you ever, granny—ever see any one whom Willie looks like?"

The old woman gave her a quick glance over her glasses.

"Yes, dearie."
"When?"
"A good many years ago."
"Where?"
"Here."
"Here?"
"At Silverdale Castle—yes."
"Who was it?"
"A boy who was visiting there with his mother."

"What was his name?"
"Damyn."
"Geoffrey Damyn?"
"I believe so."
"Oh," the girl cried, laughing, "I was right, then! That is the resemblance I saw. But I was wondering if anyone else would notice it. It is very singular."

Mrs. Morris continued her keen scrutiny. But there was nothing in Lady Iva's face but pleasurable interest.

When one has made a discovery of any sort it is agreeable to have someone else approve the same.

"Well, I must be going."
Lady Iva stood up, lifting the little chap in her strong young arms.

"Good by, Willie!"
He put his "wet little, warm little, mouth" down on hers as she held him laughingly above her.

A few minutes later, seal-kin-capped and saqued, she was out in the frosty sunshine and walking briskly into town.

Mrs. Trendworth passed her, driving, and drew up to insist that she ride with her.

But Iva shook her head.

"Not such a lovely day. I would not give up my walk for anything."

She passed a few officers as she turned into the main street of Rothlyn.

They doffed their caps and looked after the erect young figure with a good deal of admiration.

Her shopping over, she came out of the town library. As she stepped across the threshold a gentleman, lounging a few feet away, promptly straightened up and joined her.

"Good-morning, Lady Iva!"
He held out a shapely brown hand.
She nodded, smiled, and gave him her slim fingers for a moment.

"Good morning."
"I don't see your rig."
He was looking up and down the quiet street.

"I walked in."
"Really?"
"Truly."
"It is every foot of four miles."
"Doubtless. But that is no very appalling distance, you know."

"And you are going to walk back?"
She looked up mischievously.
"I cannot very well return otherwise."
He laughed. It seemed very easy to laugh just now. The world was a jolly place after all.

"My road is the same as yours," he averred.
"But you rode in. I see your horse."

"I must leave him to be shod," he declared, gravely; but his eyes were twinkling.

He called a boy, gave him a shilling to take the animal to the blacksmith's, and then turned to the Earl's daughter.

"Allow me," taking her book.
"But I did not say you might come with me."

She was looking very beautiful, very winsome, her soft cheeks carmined by her rapid walk, her shining eyes the deep, rich blue of "violets in shady spots."

"You could not be so cruel as to say I should not? It is not in your nature—such heartlessness."

"Is it not?" she queried, lightly. "Ah, you do not know me!"

But she was walking on beside him.

"Don't be too sure of that," in a voice that was earnest and thrilling.

Over the bridge spanning the narrow stream, out of town they went.

The snow was deep for Sussex, but they were both good pedestrians.

"And how about the ball?" Lionel asked, breaking the rather embarrassing silence which had fallen upon them.

"I am going."

His handsome, dark face brightened wonderfully.

"That is good news. And will you, Lady Iva, save the first dance for me?"

She flashed him a smile.

"I will"—and then, when he would have broken out in expressions of gratitude—"I will—think about it."

"Lady Iva!"
"Mr. Lionel!"

"You can be cruel, after all."

The proud, crimson lips drooped like those of a sorrowful child.

"Why? Because I said I would think about it? Well, you are complimentary! Would you prefer I should refuse to consider it?"

The young fellow wheeled toward her protestingly.

"Now, you know I don't—couldn't mean that."

"How am I cruel, then?"

"Oh, tormenting Lady Iva!"

"In not saying yes at once!" he burst out.

A smile came dimpling around the lovely mouth. It was sternly banished.

"You would not value such a promise. You would think it was too lightly won."

"Not I," he insisted, strenuously. "Try me and see."

But very dubiously Lady Iva shook her head. She did not say a word.

For fully a hundred feet they walked on in silence. Then she looked up brightly at her escort.

"Sir Geoffrey Damyn arrived at the Castle last night."

"Did he?" sulkily.
Lady Iva turned away her face a moment. It was quite serious when she looked again at her companion.

"Yes. He is very handsome."

"Is he?"
Such a dismal voice!

"Very!" with emphasis.

And then, after a slight pause, "He, too, is going to the Braceborough ball."

Lionel's eyes flashed.

"And you, I suppose, are reserving the first dance for him?"

Her innocent, violet-black eyes were up-raised to his.

"Why should I do that?"

"Oh, I don't know!" morosely, almost roughly, "unless you think it would anger me."

Lady Iva drew herself up.

"And what difference," she demanded, icily and quietly, "does it make to me whether you choose to be angered or not?"

He felt as if he had been drenched with cold water.

"Oh, not any, of course!" he avowed, dreadfully apologetic.

The remainder of their walk was rather dull. Now and then a smile came lurking in Iva's dimples, but Lionel, looking frowningly ahead, did not see it.

When they reached the entrance to the demesne she turned and held out her hand.

"Good bye! What a charming walk we've had! Shan't we see you at kettledrum?" she asked, cordially.

The poor fellow stared at her as he released her hand.

"I—I don't think so."

"Oh, yes, come if you can; and you can if you will. I want to talk about the ball. You ought to be interested in that, as I have promised to save the first and the last dance for you. Good-bye!"

(To be continued.)

It is a great and noble thing to cover the blemishes and to excuse the failings of a friend; to draw a curtain before his stains, and to display his perfections; to bury his weaknesses in silence, but to proclaim his virtues upon the housetop.

ONE of the institutions of Cassel, in northern Germany, is a girls' school, founded by a literary woman, daughter of a former burgomaster, Fraulein Marie Calm. The school is intended specially for the class of girls, above the peasant, who do not wish to become teachers—a profession that is everywhere over-crowded. It gives to about three hundred pupils a complete training in sewing of all kinds, from the making of a towel to the finish of an elegant dress or bonnet, and turns them out complete seamstresses, embroiderers, dressmakers and milliners. The graduating test is the submission of a complete set of work, including a specimen of every description of under and outer wear. These sets are sold, and the worker receives the money. The school graduates about forty girls every year; and though Fraulein Calm died last year most unexpectedly, she had secured permanent buildings, and placed it on such a foundation, with the help of other intelligent women, as secures its continuance. In fact, it has become a model for other schools throughout Germany. Like Frau Napratek, Fraulein Calm was not a rich woman. Her mother and herself lived in their own pleasant little home, supported mainly by her busy pen. Her school was the result of effort made first in a very small and inexpensive way, which grew into importance as its practical character was developed, and received the substantial recognition of the town, as well as of the people.

THE NEW MOON.

—o—

OUTLINED against the darkling blue,
The little silver crescent hung;
Upon the serene summer air
The flowers their fragrance flung.

"Now make a wish," said Lillian,
"For know you not, whatever boon
That of the new moon you may ask,
It will be granted soon?"

"O'er my right shoulder, I can see
The silver gleam: good-luck be mine,
My wish I'll make quite secretly,
That you may not divine."

He smiled upon her, as they stood
Beside the casement opened wide.
"I've made my wish," said he: "it is
That you may be my bride."

Lifting up her fair sweet face,
She looked at him with mock surprise.
"Why, that is what I wished!" she said,
The love-light in her eyes.

Ah, little moon—'twas thus you brought
Together loving hearts and true.
They might have drifted far apart,
Had it not been for you.

N. T. G.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

—o—

CHAPTER XLVI.

"WELL! This is a very peculiar sight," exclaimed Mrs. de Rippington, as she came with her usually stealthy step across the hall, and saw the Baronet, Whistler, and James, all gathered round what seemed to be the lifeless body of Brenda Farquhar. "I have yielded to you in every thing, Sir Eric, but my conscience will not allow me to countenance any act of brutality or violence. I hope no bodily injury has befallen Miss Farquhar!"

"I don't know if your conscience will approve of a fall downstairs," said Sir Eric, scornfully. "That is all that has happened. For Heaven's sake," his voice changing to a tone of the acutest anxiety, "come here, and tell me that she hasn't broken her spine, or done anything awful!"

There was a solemn silence whilst Mrs. de Rippington knelt down and peered into the white face, resting so helplessly on Sir Eric's arm.

She raised the body gently, lifted one arm, then the other, softly moved each foot, and, shaking her head gravely, announced it as her belief that the only injury of any consequence was the blow on the left temple, where there was a large black bruise just under the soft brown hair.

Sir Eric drew a deep breath, and stooped his head with an almost irrepressible longing over his refractory ward.

How softly her hair curled on the smooth, white forehead! What pride in the delicately curved nose! What tenderness in the soft, ripe lips!

She had never looked so lovely to him before as now, when her head drooped in helpless abandon on his arm, and a few stray locks of hair hung about the softness of her throat.

He would have kissed her with all the passion of his storm-tossed heart, but some small remnant of proper feeling restrained him from taking such a mean advantage of her helplessness before the prying eyes of his servants.

Mrs. de Rippington tapped him gently on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, Sir Eric, but would it not be prejudicial to your future plans if Miss Farquhar came to herself downstairs?"

"You are right," said Sir Eric, as the wis-

dom of the suggestion struck him forcibly. "She must wake to find herself in her own rooms. I wish to Heaven I could carry her there myself. I could do it so easily if it weren't for my cursed leg."

It went against him sorely to see her handled ever so carefully by the two men, but there was no help for it.

As he followed slowly, grasping the banister tightly, as if his leg hurt him more than usual, his conscience, which had been as torpid as a dormouse in the winter, woke to sudden life.

His own baseness was more apparent to himself than it had ever been before, and he almost gasped at the thought that he had sunk so low.

"I am afraid that you have been very imprudent with that poor, dear leg," murmured the widow's smooth voice, as something like a groan escaped his lips.

He turned upon her savagely. "Whatever I have done or not done is my own concern. I did not ask you here to look after me."

Her lemon-coloured face flushed a dusky red, and she shot a vindictive glance at him from under her heavy lids.

"I believe you asked me here to be Miss Farquhar's chaperon; but, strange to say, my services are never required when the only gentleman in the house is in her company."

"So long as your services are paid for, I am at a loss to conceive what you have to complain of," he said, haughtily, as he reached the top of the stairs with an effort. "Perhaps you will be so good as to hurry on in front, and see that those men place Miss Farquhar comfortably on the sofa."

"On the bed, I should venture to suggest."

"I said 'sofa,' and I meant it."

"Oh! very well," sourly. "I only spoke as my conscience prompted me," and she hurried on according to the Baronet's orders.

Sir Eric muttered an oath, as he looked after her black figure with a scowl. He could only regard her as a most thoroughly contemptible hypocrite, who never let her conscience speak except to her own advantage, or to make a hit at someone else, and yet he was obliged to acknowledge that he had found her very useful.

When Brenda opened her eyes she was alone with her guardian. She looked round with a deep sigh, but as soon as she saw him she closed them again with a shudder.

Incredible as it seems after the barbarous way in which he had treated her, it cut him to the heart to see that she could not look upon him without a shudder.

He tumbled down on his knees by her side, and clasped his hands in passionate entreaty.

"Forgive me, Bren!"

"Why am I lying here? What has happened?" she asked, looking up with an air of bewilderment.

"You've had a fall—a terrible fall! I thought you had gone from me for ever!"

"Oh, why didn't I die?" she cried, in bitter regret. "Why was anyone cruel enough to bring me back to life—and you?"

"Bren, I've been a brute. I know it; but upon my honour, I'll be good to you for the rest of my days. Only say that you will love me a little!"

"Don't talk of love," wearily; "mine is all gone, buried in his grave," as once again she touched the gold locket with her lips.

A malicious smile lit up his handsome face.

"Kiss it again and again," he said, eagerly. "It's an awful sell for you, poor old girl, but the hair in it is mine!"

"Yours!" starting up and looking him straight in the face with flashing eyes. "You mean to say you told me a dastardly lie when you said that it was Cyril's?"

"It was a harmless fraud, and if I liked to think you wore a lock of my hair round your neck day and night where's the harm? I got your kisses by a sort of proxy."

"Disgusting!" she cried, as with shaky fingers she untied the ribbon, and flung the locket into the furthest corner of the room. The diamonds flashed as they passed over the Baronet's head, and he followed them gloomily with his eyes. Slowly he rose from his knees, all his softer feelings turned to wormwood and gall by her action.

"It's no use trying to be friends with you," he said, bitterly. "You are as cold-blooded as a frog, and I only wish to Heaven I could do without you."

Brenda scarcely heard him. She was sitting up with both hands clasped to her forehead, trying to collect her thoughts. A new and dazzling possibility had arisen in her mind. What if he had deceived her from the first? What if Whistler's visit to Belgium were nothing more than a blind? What if all her letters were stopped—not out of mere ill-nature, but to keep her from hearing the truth, and finding out a long-sustained deception? What if Cyril were alive! Her whole face looked as if she were transfigured with a sudden, radiant glory.

Sir Eric looked at her in speechless surprise, wondering what had happened to cause this change from pale exhaustion to glorified vitality. Presently he moved slowly towards the door, afraid to look on her any longer lest her beauty should soften his heart, and make it impossible for him to carry out his sinister purpose. Also he was conscious that if he wished to prevent any serious mischief happening to his leg, he must rest it completely for the remainder of the day.

Brenda started to her feet.

"Stop!" she cried, imperatively. "I've got something to ask you. You acknowledge that you lied to me about that lock of hair?"

Sir Eric stood still, his face darkening perceptibly.

"How can I tell that you haven't deceived me from the first? Why do you keep back all my letters if there's nothing to hide? Why won't you let me hear a single word from the outer world? Oh! tell me the truth, for Heaven's sake!" her voice failing, her hands clasped on her breast. "You've been as cruel to me as you could be, but I'll forgive you everything if you'll only tell me that Cyril's alive!"

"Are you mad?" edging towards the door. "That blow has turned your brain. Go and lie down, and Mrs. de Rippington shall come and see after you."

"I don't want her. I'm not delirious. Eric, if you are not a fiend incarnate you won't torture me any further!"

He looked at her uneasily as she stood before him, with heaving breast and disordered hair, her beautiful eyes raised to his in the most passionate entreaty, as if she would force the truth from him by the power of her glance.

His own eyes shifted, and his gaze was fixed on the ground. No answer came from his firmly closed lips, as he leant against the wall for support.

"Eric, answer me!" coming forward, and, in her eagerness, laying her hand upon his arm.

She had not touched him voluntarily for many weeks, and her little clinging fingers seemed to thrill him through every fibre of his being.

"As you hope for mercy from our Father in Heaven, tell me, is Cyril alive?"

He suddenly roused himself, and broke forth in a furious passion, his face like a thunder-cloud.

"Get away with your cursed nonsense!" he cried, roughly flinging her from him. "You're enough to drive a fellow mad. Pick up that locket," pointing to it with his stick as it lay on the floor, the diamonds glittering like a lost star. "Kiss it as you did before, or, by George, you shall pay me for the insult!"

"It may lie where it is; it's only value has gone from it," she said, contemptuously.

"I say, kiss it!" his voice raised, his eyes flashing.

"Never again!" her arms folded, her head thrown back.

"You won't? Then the consequences be on your own head!" and the next minute he was gone.

Brenda sat down on the sofa, trembling from head to foot, in a sudden collapse. She had faced her guardian with splendid courage, but it had tried her strength terribly, and her temples were throbbing as if they would burst.

She lay back on the cushions at the head of the sofa, trying in vain to calm her excited brain, for she knew that after such an accident as she had had that day any doctor would say that she ought to be kept quiet.

But how could she be quiet when the thought of the mere possibility of Cyril Farquharson's being alive had set all her nerves quivering with a new life.

Mrs. de Rippington, who came in, followed by Sarah bearing a tray, found her, a little later on, pacing up and down the room with rapid, uncertain steps. The widow gave her a searching look, and said, coldly,—

"I would advise you to lie down instead of pacing up and down like a wild animal. If you do an injury to your head after such a severe fall, remember you will only have yourself to thank."

"Who cares about my head? I believe everyone in this house would be glad to see me a corpse," she said, bitterly.

"Now, there you go too far, miss," exclaimed Sarah, "I'm sure both cook and I would have wished you to have a proper dinner; only Mr. Whistler, he stopped me at the head of the stairs, and took every single thing off the tray but the wine, the bread, and the vegetables."

Brenda's pale face flushed.

"Thank you, Sarah. I've been a prisoner for so long that I have no appetite. I suppose now they wish to starve me."

"A vegetable diet is the best thing for cooling the blood," said Mrs. de Rippington, more hastily than usual. "And now I must leave you for Sir Eric, who is fearfully ill. You must have excited him beyond measure to bring him to such a condition as he is in now."

"He can have no peace of mind whilst he treats me like this. Tell him to do his duty and set me free. That will be the best cure for his complaint," and Brenda turned away.

"Sir Eric is, no doubt, acting from the best of motives," rejoined the widow, raising her eyes to the ceiling as if in the act of invoking a blessing on such a benevolent gentleman.

"I suppose you would say the same if he starved me to death!"

To this there was no answer.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHEN Sir Eric returned to his own rooms he was in a state of mind which was nearly akin to madness. His love for his ward had become a frenzied passion, which he was determined to satisfy at any price, whilst her scorn and contempt tried him beyond endurance. He threw himself down in an arm-chair, and pulled another towards him on which to rest his leg. Then he subsided into a gloomy reverie, from which his valet tried to rouse him by a gentle cough. Having failed in all his efforts to attract his master's attention, he made up his mind to address him.

"May I ask what you wish to be done about the lady who called here to-day?" he asked respectfully.

"Done! What do you mean?" looking at him with heavy eyes.

"Only it might be inconvenient if she called here to-morrow," with a slight cough.

"True. You must find out where she lives, and I'll write her such a letter as will send her out of the county by the next train! Give me my writing things; I'll do it at once. I don't want her or any one to come prying here!"

His pen travelled over the paper at a rapid rate, for it was easy to him to insult a woman in tolerably polished language. No chivalrous scruples kept him back from saying exactly what he felt; and as his feelings at the moment were as bitter as concentrated gall and worm-wood, the language used was more striking than pleasant.

It was such a letter as no woman with a spark of pride could possibly forgive, and it was calculated to keep the recipient from ever setting her foot inside the doors which were once so wide open to receive her.

But Sir Eric forgot one important point—it was certain to turn a possible friend into the bitterest enemy, and Mrs. Wyndham was a woman who would not scruple to seize the first opportunity that presented itself of revenge.

Strange to say, he had no misgivings on that point, and he sent off his letter with a sense of satisfaction, feeling sure that she would never trouble him with another visit.

It was discovered that she had established herself at the "Fox and Grapes," a fact which caused some surprise, but no uneasiness.

Sir Eric felt certain that she would not stop any longer in such a "poky-hole," as he called it, but would probably make the best of her way to the sunny south, where they had first met, under the palms at Monte Carlo.

It was curious to remember how he had once considered her the first object of his desire. No sooner had the fruit fallen into his hand than it lost its value; no sooner had possession become possible than it ceased to be desired.

He could see it plainly now, how his love for his cousin had warred against that other love, and finally triumphed over it.

What an utter fool he had been to try to throw her into Desborough's arms! The base trick he had played on her that night had injured him more in her estimation than anything else; and, though he seemed to recover lost ground during the first shock of Cyril's death, there had been no real change in her feelings, as was proved by her passionate rejection of his love; and yet he was determined not to let her go.

Her resistance excited the most combative qualities of his complex nature.

Seclusion from everyone else had done nothing for him. If a horse were too high-couraged, the best method of taking it down was to stint its corn. Weakness of bodily strength would be more likely to break the girl's spirit than anything else. He would try what a touch of starvation would do.

He gave his orders to Whistler, and they were carried out with impeccable exactness by the valet, who conveniently chose to look upon himself as an irresponsible machine in his master's hands.

Mrs. de Rippington pretended to delude herself with the idea that Sir Eric must still be acting from the best of motives; but Sarah did not attempt to deceive herself by such sophistries. To her cold nature food seemed of far greater importance than society; therefore she could stand the poor young lady's being shut up between four walls, but her heart, or some other portion of her body, rebelled at the thought of her being robbed of her dinner.

She confided her sentiments on the subject to Mrs. de Rippington, who told her coldly she was to obey her master's orders without discussing them—a principle that few servants carry out, and which was far beyond the upper housemaid's idea of duty.

She talked the matter over with James, who told her that no doubt the master had the best of objects in view, though his actions seemed rather extraordinary. All they could do was to wait and see what happened. If he seemed to be going too far it would be time to interfere, but not when he had only just started.

Sarah acquiesced, but with sore prickings of conscience.

Sir Eric himself ate very little dinner that

night, and the darkest of clouds seemed to rest on his spirits.

To add to everything disagreeable, the pain in his leg increased to such a dreadful extent that he began to be seriously alarmed about it.

His valet confided his anxiety to Mrs. de Rippington, who jumped directly to the worst conclusions, and proposed sending at once for the doctor.

If anything happened to Sir Eric, she would lose all the money she hoped to make out of her compliance to his wishes.

She therefore took it upon herself to ask if one of the grooms had not better start at once for Dr. Whitehead's; but she was only most rudely snubbed for her officiousness, and Whistler was sworn at for the same cause.

It certainly would be embarrassing to have the doctor in the house, especially when he would have to come to the very next room to Brenda's.

If she chanced to hear his voice outside her door she would be sure to make a great outcry, and the most unpleasant disclosures must follow.

No. Sir Eric dared not risk it, but he had the sense to know that he might suffer from the consequences all his life if his leg were neglected now.

It was no wonder that this knowledge chafed his irritable nature to such a degree that he broke out into violent abuse of everyone who came near him.

Whistler could endure to be sworn at with the utmost equanimity, but he was bent upon having his own way with his master, and, above all things, anxious not to let him slip through his hands.

If the bone had slipped, and the result was a compound fracture, nobody but an experienced doctor could do Sir Eric any good.

Amateur advice, such as he himself could offer, would be worthless, for a practical knowledge of surgery was absolutely necessary.

He even went so far as to propose that a narcotic should be administered to Miss Farquhar, so as to keep her quiet during the doctor's visit; but Sir Eric declared, with an oath, that he would not have that prying fellow Whitehead poking his nose into the house for anything; and as to narcotics, he had no opinion of them—they always made him doubly wide-awake when he wanted to get some sleep.

He lay back on the sofa groaning, his brows drawn together as if by pain. He had drunk a good deal at dinner, in order to keep himself up, and the alcohol was working disastrously on his brain. The window was wide open, and the harvest moon was seen in all its glory, its beams silvering with a flood of radiance the silent park, where the deer were resting—the gardens where the flowers were blooming, with no one to care for them—the old grey mansion with its castellated towers, where generation after generation of the proud race of Farquhar had lived, and loved, and died.

One ray penetrated through the uncurtained window, and gave an unearthly, almost ghastly, beauty to Sir Eric's face.

He looked as if he were dead, and the darkness of brows and lashes, and short, close-cut curls was strangely accentuated.

His eyes were closed; a terrible scowl wrinkled the cold whiteness of his forehead. It looked as if his soul had passed from its earthly tenement in the midst of a fearful struggle.

Even Whistler, the impenetrable, was disagreeably impressed, and though he knew that he would be sworn at if he did, he longed to make a noise in order to rouse his master into sudden movement.

He had his wish the next moment, without any exertion on his own part, for Sir Eric suddenly started up with a gasping cry.

"There—there!" he cried, hoarsely, his eyes, which were nearly starting out of his head, fixed on the moonlit space between the sofa and the window.

"Back! back! Oh, Heaven, he's coming! Don't let him touch me. Keep him off! keep him off!" his voice rising to a scream, the sweat in large drops streaming out on his brow.

Whistler sprang to the bell and rang it again and again, terrified almost out of his wits, feeling desperately inclined to run out of the room, yet chained there against his will.

He stared with wide-open eyes at Sir Eric as he got up from the sofa and staggered towards a high-backed chair on to which he held with trembling hands.

Whistler could see that he was shuddering from head to foot, as he stood there, with white face, his eyes still fixed on the moon-beam, as if he saw something more than mortal in its ghostly light.

The door opened, and in came Mrs. de Rippington, James and Sarah, all in breathless haste, the urgent ringing of the bell having called them from their different rooms.

They stood huddled together in a heap near the door, overpowered by a sudden, chill dread, such as none of them had ever felt before.

Sir Eric did not seem to be aware of their presence, as he gasped for breath, leaning heavily on the chair.

His whole attention was fixed on something that he saw, or fancied he saw, straight before him; and there was something so strange and inexplicable in that fixed gaze at an invisible thing, which struck an icy chill to the hearts of the lookers on.

By the tight clutch of his fingers on the carved woodwork, by the ghastly expression of his face, it was evident that the master, who too often had seemed neither to fear Heaven nor hell was struggling against an overpowering dread; and the horror, which they could not understand, spread from him to them as if by an electric wire.

Presently, the strong impetuous nature seemed to break from the bonds which fettered it; and to the still greater horror of those who were watching him, he hurled the most fearful curses at the "thing" which he thought he saw.

Sarah held tight on to James's coat-sleeve, Whistler drew close to Mrs. de Rippington, who held up her head, and tried to seem as if she did not mind it, though her livid face and compressed lips betrayed that her courage had failed her more than she liked to acknowledge.

"Shall I go and get Miss Farquhar to come?" whispered Whistler as steadily as he could, for his teeth were chattering. "She's got a rare amount of pluck, and she's the only one who can manage him."

"Are you mad?" with intense contempt, which seemed out of place under the circumstances. "Once open her door, and she'd be out of the house in a moment. And then, how would you like to face Sir Eric in the morning?"

Whistler said nothing, being at the end of his resources, but stood shivering and shaking, his eyes fixed on his master.

"Yes, you fend!" cried Sir Eric, hoarsely, "Go back to the place you came from. You wanted to do me out of it all, didn't you? but I was too much for you. Come to fetch me, have you?" with a strident laugh. "I'm not ready yet. No, by Heaven! I'm not ready. Curse you—curse you a thousand times!" his voice rising again almost to a scream. "You can't touch me," crouching back as if some deadly thing were coming near him. "Brenda, Brenda! where are you? For Heaven's sake come and save me! I—I can't stand it. Here take that, you fend, and go!" seizing up a large footstool, and hurling it with all his might at the space before him.

It claved the moonbeam in two, then dropped with a crash on to the floor, which was followed by a still louder crash, as Sir Eric lost his balance and fell with an appallingly heavy thud, just where the moonbeams rested on the Turkey carpet. Every movable thing in the room shook, the windows rattled in their

frames; one or two chairs were overturned, and the servants involuntarily shrank up against the door. Whistler and the widow were the first to recover themselves.

The valet advanced slowly towards his master, and raised his head with shaky hands. The face had an ashen look about it, like the greyness of death, and there was a slight white froth about the blue lips.

"Here Sarah, bestir yourself," exclaimed Mrs. de Rippington in a business-like tone, "some water in a basin; and you, turning to Whistler, "undo his shirt collar, and give him room to breathe."

They both obeyed her in a mechanical fashion, but were too much upset to have any hope in their efforts. Whistler shook his head gloomily, and thought his master had slipped through his fingers at last, whilst James and Sarah took this last calamity as a judgment from Heaven, and wondered if they themselves would get off scot-free.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Mrs. WYNDHAM sat in the very best parlour of the "Fox and Grapes." This inn had none of the beauty or picturesque quality of "The Miller and Red," but it was conveniently situated near the bottom of the straggling High-street of Wilmington, and close to the railway station.

Sir Eric's letter was in Lillian's hand, and her face was flushed with indignation. But after a while the first fury of her anger cooled, and she began to see a reason for the unnecessary insult.

"He insults me in order to stop me from ever coming to the house. Therefore, he must have something to hide—and that something is Brenda Farquhar—I'd bet a thousand francs. But my dear Sir Eric, don't you flatter yourself that you've done with me. I would do my best for the poor girl, for her own sake; but now I've revenge to urge me on, and nothing shall stop me. What's the time?" pulling out a toy watch, the back of which had her monogram set in diamonds. "Half-past eight—not too late to go out for a walk, I'll begin at once."

She rang the bell, told Violette to accompany her, and a few minutes later they set off, leaving a message for the landlord that the lady had a bad headache, and wished for fresh air, and he was not to be alarmed if they happened to be late.

Mrs. Wyndham was sorry to bring Violette with her on such a secret expedition, but in spite of her vaunted courage she dared not face the loneliness of the park by herself.

She explained nothing to her, however, as they made their way over the stile, which was placed in a gap in the palings where the public had a right of way across one corner of the estate.

It was so densely dark under the trees that the two women drew close together in a fright at the sound of a falling leaf or a belated rabbit scampering home to his burrow, or even at the sound of their own footsteps if they happened to tread on some withered ferns which made a rustle against their dresses.

"Oh, *parole d'honneur*, Madame, I can go no farther," and Violette stopped short, having just taken a white cow for a terrible ghost. She leant against the slender stem of a mountain-ash, and looked as if she were going into hysterics.

"Very well," was the calm rejoinder. "It will suit me just as well to leave you here. You can sit down on that stump," pointing to the very one on which Flossie had so often sat with Sir Eric, "and wait till I come back!"

"Wait here alone! Does Madame want me to go mad?" gasped the maid, as if she could scarcely believe her ears.

"Then if you won't wait you must come

on, for I have no time to lose," said her mistress, impatiently, her own courage rising as she remembered the letter which she had in her pocket.

All was still when they reached the gardens of The Towers—still as death. The cold, white moonlight streamed over the beds of tall dahlias and golden calceolarias, and the long, even rows of red geraniums, over the grey facade of the old home of the Farquhars, where the present unworthy representative of the race hid his guilty secret.

There were lights here and there, but most of the bedrooms were dark, as if there were few guests staying in the house.

"You stay here," said Mrs. Wyndham, this time pointing just under the terrace to a seat which was hidden from the house, and yet in the full light of the moon.

Violette obeyed, because she did not dare do anything else; but her curiosity was excited to the utmost, and she determined to keep both eyes and ears wide open.

Lillian walked on briskly, keeping under the terrace wall, so that she might not be seen from the windows.

Every step she took reminded her of the man whom she had so nearly married. Then he had seemed to her as a harbour of refuge for her storm-tossed boat—or a chivalrous, upright, English gentleman, who was ready to receive her with open arms, without asking a question as to the past. Now she considered him as a base, unscrupulous man, with no sense of honour, no thought of anything in life but the reckless fulfilment of every wish.

At one time he was ready to move heaven and earth to win herself; but almost as soon as she was won, his fancy passed on to his ward. She knew that she had treated him badly, so there was some excuse for his faithlessness, but if her suspicions were true as to his treatment of Brenda—the whole county should ring with his infamy.

Still keeping under the terrace, she turned the corner, and looking up eagerly in the direction of Miss Farquhar's bedroom, she saw that the one window which looked out towards the south was lighted up.

Her heart beat fast as she hurried on to the other corner, and stepping back under a drooping willow, raised her eyes again.

Every window belonging to Brenda's suite of rooms was lighted up, which seemed to confirm her suspicions that Sir Eric's ward was there, and not at Brighton; but the windows of the Blue Room were illuminated as well as several others in the same row, and after all those rooms might be filled with anybody whom the Baronet liked to put in them, and not by the young mistress of the house.

Mrs. Wyndham was not a woman to be easily baffled, as her presence in Sir Eric's gardens at that time of night sufficiently proved.

A strange noise, as of a voice speaking rapidly, came through the open window of the Blue Room.

She listened. It was evidently Sir Eric talking under the influence of great excitement, and she was glad of it, for if he were thoroughly occupied he would not be so likely to keep a sharp look-out.

Still the noise sounded uncanny, and her heart beat violently against her ribs, as with cautious footsteps she went softly up the broad white steps on to the terrace. Nobody seemed to be about, but she dared not make a sound to attract Brenda's attention.

She looked round for a stone to throw in at the open window, but the walks were most carefully rolled, and as hard as adamant.

If she gave a little cough she was afraid that Sir Eric would look out and discover her. Yet to go back, having accomplished nothing, was too disappointing to be thought of.

In this predicament, she remembered a gold bangle which she always wore on her wrist.

It was Indian, and of a very peculiar shape, so Brenda was sure to recognise it. If she



[AN ACCUSING CONSCIENCE!]

had only a pencil and a bit of paper she might have sent her a message on it, but she had been foolish enough not to think of either.

She detached the bracelet, and after one loving look at it—for she was very fond of it because of the old memories attached to it—she raised her arm, and flung it with all her might up at the window which was next but one to that of the Blue Room.

It touched the sill, and came down with a clatter on the gravel. Dismayed at the noise it made she picked it up, and looked round to see if it had attracted attention. But just at that moment there was a tremendous crash in the Blue Room, and, taking advantage of it, with great presence of mind she threw the bracelet up again, fearing that it would be her last chance. Thank Heaven! it cleared the sill, and must have penetrated inside the room.

She waited, what seemed to her a long time, though, in reality, only a minute and a half; whilst Brenda, suddenly roused from the sort of dreamless stupor into which she had fallen, started from the sofa, picked up the bracelet, and stared at it with wildly questioning eyes. She knew it—she had seen it before, but where—where?

Her brain was still confused from the blow on her temple, and she could scarcely collect her thoughts.

She hurried to the window and leant out—still wondering and conjecturing—with a wild thrill of hope in her desolate heart.

Lillian saw her, and recognised her at a glance, principally by the cut of her head and her graceful shoulders. This was the girl whom Paul Desborough loved, and yet she—Lillian Wyndham—was doing her best to save her!

She almost wondered at herself as she stood on tiptoe, and opened her lips to ask one or two questions which she was dying to have answered. At that moment, when the prisoner above and the watcher below would

have given worlds to have two minutes to themselves, an unsteady light appeared at the end of the terrace, and the sound of hurrying footsteps came along the smooth gravel.

Lillian turned and fled, making for the steps with the speed of a hare—and Brenda peered out into the darkness, her hands pressed to her aching temples, her heart beating high with hope—and saw nothing!

But Heaven had not forgotten her—her friends had found her out, and her imprisonment would soon be over!

Soon she would be free, and this horrible time would seem like a nightmare—thank Heaven!

Meanwhile, James Smith came to a standstill close under the window, holding up his lantern and turning it round, so that its light might fall up and down the terrace.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he muttered to himself in perplexity. "I could have taken my dying oath, I could, that I saw a figger standing just where I am myself. If I once get to thinking there's ghosts about the place it's not long before I give up this sort of sentinel business. I'm jiggered if I'd keep it on. There's something queer going on with the master, I expect. I'll just give a look round to see that there's nobody on the premises, and then I'll turn in and have a snack of supper. I'm sure I've earned it."

"Violette, come!" cried Lillian, breathlessly, as soon as she reached the seat where she had left her maid. "We must run down the shrubbery quick as lightning."

Violette took to her heels, and thought she would ask the reason why later on. Her own impulse was never to stop running until she reached the doors of "The Fox and Grapes;" but her mistress's energies soon flagged, and, unaccustomed as she was to such violent exertion, Lillian was glad to lean upon the Frenchwoman's arm when they were clear of the park.

As soon as they reached the inn she wrote two telegrams to be sent off to Belgium as

early as possible, and smiled as she wiped her pen.

"I've checkmated you this time, Sir Eric—and I shall have my revenge!"

(To be continued.)

MINGRELIAN ETIQUETTE.—In the highland regions of the Western Caucasus the manners of the Grusinian mountain-folk are pretty much what they were a quarter of a century ago, when the Russians first came into the country. A Mingrelian "How d'you do?" of the genuine old-fashioned kind is still an elaborate performance that takes no account of time. As in Palestine and elsewhere, Grusinian etiquette requires that salutations shall be exchanged as soon as the parties meeting come within sight of each other, and to leave out the most trivial inquiry relating to the most insignificant member of another's household is accounted extremely bad form; so that a couple of silk-shirted Mingrelian elders—they are particularly fond of silk garments, which they wear without changing until they drop to pieces—will begin a series of bows and bendings when half a mile from each other, and continue them with a running fire of exclamations until they come within hailing distance. Then the inquiries commence. "How is your health?" and "How have you been?" "How is your mother, your wife, and your nurse?"—nurses are very important personages in all Mingrelian households. "How is your overseer, and your yard-master and hardsmen?" "Is your favourite horse well? and are your cattle and sheep in good health?" and so on, in a regular diminutive, ending with the meanest maid-servant and scullion of the person addressed, if the latter be a man of standing or position, and not forgetting even "his honour's dog." When the principals have finished, their attendants proceed as deliberately to exchange similar compliments. Time is of no consequence.



[THE STORY OF A BITTER SORROW.]

NOVELETTE.]

THE SECRET OF THE GABLE END.

—X—

CHAPTER I.

THE snow was coming down still; it had been falling all night, until all around Crome Hall was one vast sheet of spotless white, and still it continued twisting and twining, curvetting and dancing in the frosty air, while the heavy grey clouds overhead spoke of plenty more that had yet to come.

"Never such a winter since 1870," old Thomas said, when opening the shutters of the dining-room which commanded a view of the park-like grounds, and he shivered at their wintry aspect, his bones, for he had little else, rattling within his loose garments that had become two sizes too large for him since they left the hands which had made them. He moved away then, taking no notice of the girl who was making preparations to clean the stove, and who had asked if that had been a very severe one, meaning the winter, the while he kept muttering to himself 1870, repeating the date so frequently that Mary wondered what had come to the old gentleman.

He had been in the family long before she was born, and every new comer amongst the servants looked up to him with almost as much respect as they would to the master himself, and, in fact, more so, for where the one was always present with them the other was scarcely ever visible. Mrs. Grath, the housekeeper, being the only one to whom he opened his lips, with the exception of old Thomas, who waited on him hand and foot, watching over him with the fidelity of a dog.

He had been with his father before him, nursing him, the present Squire, when he was a wee boy in a black velvet dress, with a broad

scarlet sash, staying on after the death of the former, and he had seen the wife he loved so fondly asleep in her last narrow bed.

Master Hugh, as he was called then, was away at the time, but "you will be as true to him as you have been to us," was the trust left to the old servant by his dead mistress; and since then he had ever looked upon Mr. Girensstein as little more than a son and a little less than a god, the while he would as soon have expected to have seen the old gable end of the Hall where the ivy grew removed as himself from the family of which he had become a part.

It was all coming back to his memory now as it always did at this time of the year. As he shuffled along the tessellated floor of the passage which led to the housekeeper's room, "How time flies," and "It seems but yesterday," being sentences which he jerked out as he went along.

Mrs. Grath was standing before the fire when he entered, the while a copper urn was hissing on the table, and a savoury smell pervaded the apartment, which had the effect of bringing Thomas back to the present, and for a short time putting from his mind the events of that disastrous year.

"Good morning, Mrs. Grath," he said, advancing, his bones rattling audibly, owing to the difference of the temperature. "This, is winter, and no mistake."

"Very seasonable, Mr. Cross," was the reply; "but for my part I hate the cold weather, and when I see the lawn all white, as it is now, I always think of that night, now seventeen years ago," and Mrs. Grath shuddered as she replaced the cup she had lifted to her lips.

Thomas did not reply for a moment or two; he was thinking too, and then he raised his withered face, where the wrinkles lay so thick and deep, a moisture gathering over the lustreless eyes.

"Will it always be the same, I wonder, Mrs. Grath?" she said.

"Heaven only knows," was the reply; "sometimes I think no, and then just as I hope for the best something occurs, such as this, for instance, and she looked towards the window, from which nothing was to be seen but the pure white snow, forming a fairy landscape as it rested on branch and bough without.

"The master knows best, of course," Thomas said, after a pause. "But I don't think it was very wise, and Miss Evie coming home too, poor child."

"Well it was a difficult thing to know what to do, and had we been in his place, maybe we should have done the same, and as for the child, she is as ignorant of facts as when she was first left a motherless babe in my arms. The blue room is to be hers, and Mr. Hugh has had it fitted up in Parisian style, I think he called it, not that I understand much of French ways; but that it is a perfect little Paradise there can be no two opinions about it. I wonder what time they will arrive?"

"There are only two trains from London. I expect they'll come by the one reaching Crome at 4.30. Anyway, the carriage shall be sent to the station to the early one as well, so that there be no mistake in the matter," and Thomas, having finished his breakfast, rose as easily as his rheumatic limbs would allow him, and left the room to see that his orders were carried out.

Mrs. Grath only stayed a few minutes after, the paper she usually looked over in the first instance on this occasion being put on one side, the while she gave directions for the table to be cleared as she proceeded to ascend the stairs which led to the rooms above.

It was not the principal staircase ascending from the large entrance hall up which she went, but one from the back part of the house, which led through a baize door studded with brass nails to the same corridor, dividing

the gallery which faced the rooms on either side and looked down on the hall beneath.

They were mostly bed chambers, the reception-rooms being chiefly on the ground-floor, where they opened on to terraces, and ornamental *parterres*, but those used constantly were on the right, while the left wing, or gable end, as it was styled, were left unoccupied, with the exception of one or two apartments which Mrs. Grath kept for her own use, the others being filled with lumber, and therefore never entered by any one else save the traditional ghost, who was supposed to retain them for its sole accommodation.

But although all the servants shunned that portion of the house as they would the plague, only one housemaid declared she had heard anything, and she holding out that there was somebody singing there one night when she went upstairs to do the bedrooms, Mrs. Grath told her she was a fool, and if she adhered to such nonsense as that the sooner she left the better. So the next day she packed her boxes, and went, still convinced of the truth of her statement.

It was not to that side that the housekeeper now went, but to the other, where everything had been put in readiness to receive the young lady who was to return home that day, as also Mr. Hugh himself, who had for some time been absent.

A bright fire was burning in the grate of the blue room, so called from the colour of its furniture, which was upholstered in sky-blue satin, the half tester bed with hangings of the same colour over it, similar to those which shaded the window, and divided this room from one smaller fitted as a boudoir.

The prettiest portion of the grounds was visible from here, where the lawn sloped to the edge of a lake, on the other side of which a thick belt of trees formed a tiny forest, all now so picturesque in its garb of spotless snow.

I wonder what she is like, Mrs. Grath was thinking. She was a pretty child, but then, they say, pretty children grow up plain.

But that was not the case with Evie Girenstein, whom the housekeeper could not in her wildest dreams have imagined to have displayed such beauty, for that was what she told Thomas, when a few hours after they were discussing the young lady who had just arrived.

Of course, she scarcely knew them, she was so young when she was sent away, and ten years had left their impression deep on the aged faces of the old servants.

"Surely, Evie, you remember Mrs. Grath, who used to spoil you so terribly that I was obliged for your own sake to withdraw you from being irretrievably ruined?" her father said, laughing, when the housekeeper came up to have just one look, as she stammered out, at the little girl she had so often carried in her arms, and then she blushed, hoping she would not think her too forward.

"No, oh, no!" the girl said, extending a tiny gloved hand. "I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Grath, and once more to be at home, though it all seems strange to me just now; but I can recollect, young as I was, everything here in the hall," looking round the while, "and those dreadful men in armour which used to frighten me so, for some one used to tell me they would take me away if I were not good. And it was Thomas, I remember now, who would tell me it was all nonsense, and no one should take me away from him, and then he would carry me off to the housekeeper's room."

"To be petted by the housekeeper herself," her father continued. "But now, Evie, you had better let Mrs. Grath conduct you to your own room, and we will talk over old times later on, when we have had dinner."

"Yes, papa, dear, for I am frightfully hungry; so give directions, please, for my luggage to be taken upstairs, and Matilde will attend me."

The latter sentence was addressed to Mrs. Grath, who till then could not take her eyes

from the fair young face before her, the while Matilde, a little French girl Evie had brought with her, was making preparations to carry out her mistress's instructions, and then they ascended to the room which had been prepared for the youthful heiress.

"Ring the bell, miss, when you are ready," Mrs. Grath said, pointing to one of the old-fashioned bell pulls that hung each side of the fireplace, "and a servant will show you to the drawing-room," and then she turned with the intention of retracing her steps, when to her surprise Mr. Hugh stood before her.

He had waited in the corridor before going to his own room, until he heard her close the door of Evie's, and then he came forward.

"What do you think of our little girl, Mrs. Grath?" he asked.

"She is very beautiful, Mr. Hugh, reminding me much of—"

"Her mother," the other finished, for the housekeeper hesitated to complete the sentence. "Yes, as one who knew her could fail to see it, and when the country people call, which they are sure to do, they will be seeing it, too. I was going to ask you, don't you think it would be as well not to let any one know my daughter was with me?"

He was leaning against the door sill to wards which he had moved, his hand on the handle of the door itself, that he could open it in an instant, speaking to Mrs. Grath as a son might have done.

"It would be sure to eke out, sir," she answered, "and it is so long ago now, that people are not likely to refer to that, and you could not shut up a bird that had once known liberty, but it would pine away, moping itself to death."

"Well, perhaps you are right, Grath. I will let things take their course. And there?"

The last words caused Mrs. Grath to turn towards the door that led to the gable end, her master's eyes looking in that direction.

"I don't see no difference, sir. A trying night, last night, with the snow thick under the windows; but there is Miss Evie's bell," and apologising for not being able to stay longer she passed on down the staircase leading to the servants' offices.

CHAPTER II.

"WHEN Hugh entered the drawing-room later on Evie was already there. She had thoroughly investigated the apartment, in which were several articles that came back to her remembrance.

Over the chimney-glass hung the portrait of a lady, the eyes apparently watching her every movement as she glided around, and when at last she stopped to look at the lovely face which gazed persistently into her own she became aware of a similarity in their features, and so intent was she on the picture, that she could not avoid a start when her father's hand rested on her shoulder.

It was bare, like to those in the painting, and Hugh could not fail to be impressed by the striking likeness between them.

"Oh! papa, what a lovely face!" Evie said, when she recovered herself.

"And very like your own, Evie," and he looked down from the one to the other; then with a sigh, adding "It was your mother. She was about your age when that was taken."

He moved aside, then leading her to the window, from which he drew back the heavy velvet drapery, that she might look on the broad lands surrounding her beautiful home, "They are all my darling's," he said, "as far as the eye can reach—when I am gone."

"There was such a melancholy in his tone when the last words escaped him that the girl clung closer to his side, making the curtains to fall quickly back.

"Then I never want to call them mine," she said, petulantly.

He smiled sadly, stooping the while to impress a kiss on the upturned face, and then Thomas announced that dinner was served.

As Evie had said, she was hungry, and she did full justice to the repast Mrs. Grath had provided, while she amused her father with anecdotes of her school life, and criticisms of the girls who had been her companions; and notwithstanding the fatigue she was supposed to experience after her journey, it was nearly midnight before she ascended to her room, where Matilde awaited her.

"Poor, dear papa, and I had so much to talk about. I had no idea it was so late," she said, "when she saw how weary the little French girl appeared, I am so sorry to have kept you up so long, Matilde, but why didn't you go to sleep?"

"I did for one little while, Mademoiselle, and then I did hear you play, and I went quite softly to where you can see over in de hall, dat I might hear you better."

"It was so cold, you must have been frozen?"

"Oh, no, Mademoiselle, dere are so moomph fire here, I no feel cold; an den I hear you sing, but it was English, and me no understand."

Evie looked up through the glass at Matilde, who was unloosing the heavy coils of her golden hair.

"You must have dreamt it," she said, "for I have not sung a note this evening."

"Oh, no, Mademoiselle. I leaned over de banisters, an just when you finish, Mrs. Grath, de old lady with black satin and gold chain, come out of one door behind, and she say, 'Matilde go to your young lady's room. What are you doing here?'"

"It could not have been me, Matilde. I tell you, it must have been one of the servants."

The girl made no reply then, although Evie could see by her countenance that she still maintained that she was right, the while she silently performed the duties required of her; not until she had passed to her own room, which was near her mistress, giving voice to the conviction that it was she, whom she had heard singing, and no one else.

"As if I shouldn't know her voice amongst a thousand!" she said, in her native tongue; and servants, too, just as if they could sing like one who has been taught! Mademoiselle must think me foul!"

But after then there was no further allusion to the singing, and Matilde became quite a favourite in the servants' hall, whenever the other girls could get her to join them, Mrs. Grath being the only one who appeared to harbour a dislike towards her.

A fortnight had passed now since Evie had come to Crome Hall, and although she with her father had returned such calls as had been made, she had entered but little into society, and the first excitement over, she began to feel ennui in the absence of so little life, almost wishing for a return of the happy schooldays she had spent abroad.

The dark days before Christmas had set in, throwing so deep a gloom over the surroundings that Matilde declared she should destroy herself if something did not turn up to enliven her.

A thaw had followed on the heavy snow that had fallen, making the roads almost impassable, and the grass where the dead leaves lay one quagmire of wet and slush.

"I wish it would freeze! There would, at least, be some skating!" and Evie beat an impatient tattoo on the window-pane as she looked out on the miserable prospect, bemoaning and grumbling at the rain which beat so persistently on the other side.

"Already so tired of Crome Hall?"

It was Mr. Girenstein, who had entered unobserved, and advanced to where his daughter still stood.

She turned round with a start.

"Not of Crome Hall, papa, dear, but the rain; it is so wearying!" and she looked again on the dreary aspect.

"It is dull, my darling!" he said, kindly; "and so I have brought you this to ask you how I shall answer it?" and he held towards her an open letter he had in his hand.

"Oh, papa, dear! a ball! and dear Lady Aubrey, too. You will go, won't you?"

Hugh smiled, looking down at the pretty face, from which all gloom had vanished as if by magic, the blue eyes raised so appealingly to his in anticipation of what his reply would be.

"Would you like very much to go?" he asked.

But she made him no answer further than to throw her arms around his neck, pulling his head down that she might press her soft cheek against his in her excitement, imprinting kisses after kisses on his worn face.

"Oh! so much, dear!" she said.

And so a reply was to be sent, in which Mr. Girenstein accepted with much pleasure the invitation for himself and daughter.

"I shall feel like a fish out of water, I am afraid!" he said, and Evie regarded him in astonishment as to what he meant; and then he added,—

"I have never been to a friend's house for twenty years!"

"Twenty years!" she exclaimed, looking at him in wonder as to how he could have existed in seclusion for what appeared to her such an enormity of time. "And yet," he continued, "three of those were the happiest I ever spent. And then you came, robbing me of all that had made my home a paradise!"

He almost pushed her from him then, a look of intense suffering overspreading his features, but it soon passed.

"My darling, it was not your fault; but there are times when an evil spirit takes possession of me, prevailing over my better nature, and when I recall those happy days, and the misery which followed so quickly on, I rebel against even Heaven!"

He had drawn her towards him again, letting his hand stroke the sunny waves of her yellow hair, the while he looked down on the face so like her mother's, the lines made by his terrible suffering showing but too plainly on his drawn features.

"I am so sorry, dear papa; but you will not love me less, will you?"

He made her no answer; he could not bring his lips to speak a lie, and yet he could not find it in his heart to tell her that love with him was dead, buried in the grave of the past, leaving a memory, and that was all.

So he looked more kindly on the pretty face lifted to his,—

"I have nothing left me now but you, my child."

He made as if to add something else, but stopped suddenly, and then turned aside, but not before Evie had noticed how terribly pale he had become.

"Are you not well, papa, dear?" she asked.

"Only a momentary pain," and he put his hand on his heart. It catches me here sometimes; but it is gone now. And with a strong effort he mastered those feelings which were betraying him so in the traces they left on his countenance.

"It is fixed for the seventeenth," he said, suddenly referring to the ball a week before Christmas, and just ten days from this.

"How about your dress? But there, I suppose you and Matilde can arrange all that, I providing the needful. I should wish it simple though costly, Evie—one suitable to your years."

"Why, papa, you are quite a connoisseur in dress," she replied, laughing.

In this new excitement the colour had mounted to her temples, her eyes becoming bright and sparkling, adding so much to her beauty that Hugh Girenstein had no fear but that her fresh loveliness would hold its own amid all that would present itself in that garden of girls from which Lady Aubrey would not fail to select her guests.

Her ladyship had been a beauty in her youth, and all around Aubrey Court was beautiful,

she still retaining her love for everything lovely in creation, averring a greater pleasure in the society of the young than of those who had arrived at her own time of life.

"I am growing very old myself," she would say, though she was barely fifty, "and I don't want to be reminded of it by seeing old age in the faces of my friends. My glass tells me quite enough; consequently I look in it as little as I can, and feast my eyes on the youth it is now the turn of others to enjoy, the while it carries my mind back to what mine was."

Nevertheless, mamma with marriageable daughters were ever made welcome at the Court, and many were the surmises as to which flower amongst them would be gathered by Lionel, the tall, young guardsman who called her ladyship mother.

He was home on leave now, and it was on the occasion of his attaining his majority that the ball was given.

"How fortunate it is that your birthday did not fall a week later," Lionel, Lady Aubrey said, when, reading the answers to the invitations she had sent out she discovered Mr. Girenstein's amongst the acceptances, her son, the while, with his back to the fire, looking out on the bare trees, on which the snow was commencing to fall, almost as miserable as the prospect before him.

"Why so, mother?" he asked, endeavouring to suppress a yawn.

"Evie Girenstein would not have been amongst our guests."

"Oh! is that all?" and selecting a cigar from his case, he looked at it affectionately, bit the end, and replaced it.

"Is that all?" her ladyship repeated.

"And I tell you she is the most lovely girl I have seen for many years."

"Admitted, mother mine, if you say so," he returned, with a smile; but why should the date of my advent affect her movements in that respect?"

"It was the day Hugh Girenstein lost his son, his wife's death following closely on; and, until now, he has never been known to visit since, and I do not believe, even as it is, had it been anyone else, he would have accepted the present invitation; but we are such old friends, your father and he being at 'Christ's' together, and I thought it such a shame he should shut that little girl up as he was doing, so insisted on his lordship writing to him."

"And the pater has succeeded in drawing him out of his shell?" Lionel interrupted.

"On this occasion, yes; and I hope it will only prove the means of his never returning to it. Ridiculous! a man withdrawing himself from all society because trouble—which comes to all in some shape—should have visited him in, may be, a severer form!"

"How old was his son then, mother, when he lost him?"

"A child of three; but it was the death he met with that so affected his father, I believe, and the sorrow which followed on."

"Why? Was he murdered, or what?" Lionel asked.

But before Lady Aubrey could reply, his lordship entered the room to say he had ordered the carriage for two o'clock, and he should like her to accompany him to Worminster, to give her opinion in the selection of some new furniture he intended purchasing, also to give orders respecting the decorations for the ball-room.

"Are you coming, Lionel?" he said, turning to his son.

"I think not, father," and the young officer seated himself on a couch by the fire, feeling it even too much exertion to turn the leaves of the volume he had taken up with the intention of reading.

He wished them a pleasant drive when her ladyship returned ready equipped for the journey; and then, as the wheels grated on the gravel, he took from his pocket the weed he had recently prepared for smoking, throwing himself back in lazy luxuriousness the while for the full enjoyment of the same.

CHAPTER III.

WORMINSTER was a town of no little dimensions, assuming—since a railway had been made from it to the Metropolis—a sense of importance which it lacked before, notwithstanding that it had its Town Hall, Assembly Rooms, Police Station, and all the accessories necessary to the extent of its population.

Every requisite was to be met with at Worminster, the shops equalling those of other places where the streets, though they might be larger and more numerous, could not boast of better.

They now looked to advantage, in their display of Christmas goods, and such fairy fabrics in the way of dress material for which there would be most call during the festive season, and the vacation having already set in, there was quite an influx of the fashionable world to the little town.

Lady Aubrey had with his lordship made their selection at Mapleson's, and the order had been given to the coachman to drive to Swan and Swan, the largest drapery establishment in the place, where her ladyship alighted, and she was in the act of purchasing some velvets when she became aware of a youthful voice desiring to be shown some materials for ball dresses, in close proximity to where she was seated.

"Why, Evie Girenstein!" she exclaimed, turning round, "I thought I could not be mistaken, and where is papa?"

"I left him at the library, where he intends remaining until I have completed my purchases," Evie replied, the while a sense of disappointment passed over her countenance as she added, "I wanted him to come here with me, but he said he knew nothing about women's dress, and Matilde would be far more useful, and really, Lady Aubrey, I know so little how to choose, and think after all I had better leave it to Madame Louise to provide material and all that is requisite. I was never at a ball before, and as to selecting my own dress I know no more about it than a baby."

"Shall I help you?" her ladyship asked kindly, noting that the tears had risen to Evie's pretty eyes.

"Oh! dear Lady Aubrey, I should think it so kind," the girl answered, the cloud vanishing, which had thrown such a gloom over her young face, and when they left the shop orders were given that Evie's carriage should return for her father, the while her ladyship insisted on her entering hers, where Lord Aubrey was still seated.

Madame Louise's, was the direction given, and the footman had touched his hat, prior to mounting, when a gentleman advanced to the side, and a pair of laughing hazel eyes looked on the occupants within.

"You here, Lionel! I thought you intended remaining at home."

"And so I did, but changed my mind five minutes after, ordered the Black Prince to be saddled, and arrived at Worminster almost as soon as your ladyship," and he laughed.

"You are incorrigible," his mother smiled, a reflection of the saucy smile which played beneath his tawny moustache, and then she introduced him to her young companion.

He raised his hat, then held out his hand to Evie, who placed hers within it, whilst a rose blush suffused her face, mounting to her temples.

"I am so glad to have met you, Miss Girenstein," he said. "Lady Aubrey has spoken of you so often, that I feel we are quite old friends."

But Evie only blushed the more, smiling the while, and Lionel thinking how sweetly innocent and pretty she looked, when his lordship reminded them that it was growing late, and his horses, for which he had a great consideration if they had not, were catching cold, they moved on, Lionel saying he would be at the Court as soon as they were.

Hugh Girenstein was awaiting his daughter at the library where Lady Aubrey's message

had been delivered to him, and when they drove up he came down the steps to meet them.

"You are looking ten years younger than before Evie came home," she told Hugh, when, the girl having alighted to her father's side, he was thanking her for having taken such an interest in her. "You must now do your part in forgetting the past, for her sake. Remember, it is your duty."

He did not reply, further than to press her hand, but thinking all the while they were driving homeward. "My duty to forget," she says, and that dreadful pain like a worm for ever gnawing at his heart-strings.

The seventeenth came at last—to soon for Hugh—who dreaded again entering into the mad vortex of fashion, when he would, he felt, far rather have shut himself in a darkened room away from all but his terrible secret, which could never leave him, but on that night would be with him still, making a mockery of what the world called enjoyment.

Only for a moment a gleam of satisfaction passed over his face, when Evie came to him in the drawing-room, where he was awaiting her, in her ball dress, pride, even love, leaping into his heart, when he looked on her fair, girlish figure, the white diaphanous folds of her costume like a fleecy cloud falling around her, gathered here and there, with a silver spray; and from off the shoulders, scarce less delicate in their snowy whiteness, a diamond necklace, his gift, clasped around her rounded throat, the only ornament she wore.

All eyes were turned in their direction, when shortly after Lady Aubrey received them, in the room already filled with the youth and loveliness there assembled at Aubrey Court, and it was with a sense of pleasure that she noted how proudly Hugh led her forward.

Dancing had already commenced, the sound of the band coming to them where they stood; but it was only a quadrille, and most were engaged in filling their cards for the others which were to follow; and then they paired off, soft laughter and the hubbub of many voices mingling with the strains of the music.

The card-room had got its occupants too; and Evie, whom a great ally of Lady Aubrey had taken under her wing, having no daughters of her own, was soon surrounded by aspirants desiring to claim her as a partner.

"Pray don't leave me out in the cold!" a voice sounded over her shoulder; and, turning, she discovered Lionel, who had been evidently watching her, as she pencilled against the different dances, with a mock misery visible on his countenance.

"The next is a valse. Will you promise me that?" and then taking her card, he placed his name against all that yet remained unclaimed, returning it with a smile.

"What audacity!" Lady Brebington said, looking over it in Evie's hand, which only brought a saucy laugh to the hazel eyes of the young guardman, and then offering his arm he led his partner beyond reach of her ladyship's ears.

"You are not cross, are you?" he asked, "stooping down until his moustache almost brushed the yellow threads of her hair, when, lifting her head, she raised her face to his, the colour coming and going beneath the transparent skin; and then their eyes met, each feeling they were powerless to resist the power which was drawing them together."

"Come out into the cool," he said; when, the dance finished, she would have returned to Lady Brebington's side. "You look as if you were going to faint."

And, in truth, it was with a great effort that Evie could ward off the feeling which had suddenly attacked her, and leaning on Lionel's arm she was glad to be led to where a current of fresh cold air would revive her flagging strength.

She felt she could not speak, or the tears would have gushed from her eyes; so she allowed

him to find her a seat where the broad leaves of an extending palm would hide her from view of the dancers, and she rest unobserved until she had recovered, merely shaking her head when he asked if he should summon assistance.

"I will get you a glass of iced claret," he said, as he watched with anxiety how every vestige of colour had forsaken her face, when pressing her cold hand he left her.

The fresh air on her temples soon had the effect of warding off the faintness which had threatened her; and then, as she still remained in her secluded position, she became aware of voices in close proximity to where she was seated.

They were those of women, discussing the merits and demerits of the assembled guests; and Evie could hear them distinctly above the trickling of the water from the fountain, over which the palm drooped that sheltered her. And then she heard her own name mentioned.

"Poor child, hers is no enviable position," the one said; "and her beauty makes it all the worse; for, of course, there will be many suitors for the hand of Hugh Girenstein's daughter."

"And why should she not select one amongst them? Beautiful, and an heiress, I cannot see how she is to be pitied—unless, perhaps, you insinuate her father bringing home another wife, and the chances of an heir being born to usurp that which she has been led to consider will be hers."

The first speaker laughed outright. "My imagination would never run away with me like that," she answered; "nor is it in the least likely that Hugh Girenstein will bring a bride to Crome Hall. In fact, he—" But the remainder of the sentence was lost on Evie, Lionel returning at that juncture with the claret.

"You feel better now?" he asked kindly. And then she assuring him she had fully recovered, and would like to return to her ladyship, he led her back to where he saw his mother and her friend.

"I would like to remain here a little while, if you please, dear Lady Aubrey. The heat of the ball-room has made me feel giddy."

"Yes, sit here, my child," Lady Brebington said. "You are as white as death," and taking Evie's hand within her own declared it was as cold as ice. "That naughty boy has been whirling you round as though you were a teetotum. It really is too bad."

It was not the dancing which had had the effect on her, she told Lady Aubrey, but she was so unaccustomed to excitement.

Nevertheless, her ladyship insisted she should undergo no further fatigue, after she had rested awhile, taking her to the card-room, where she could quietly watch the players.

"Let me tell your little friend's fortune, Lady Aubrey?" one lady said, raising her bare shoulders, which were very white and plump, whilst she pushed her skirts on one side that Evie might draw a chair near her own.

Mrs. Dunvaston was considered so clever in divulging the future by aid of the cards that several of the fair sex now gathered round her, as she gave them a shuffle, previous to disclosing Evie's.

"A cloudy morn betokens a bright day," she commenced, while one by one she laid the cards before her; after, according to her directions, Evie had out them three times.

"The love offered you will be true as the heavens, but thorns will cross your path, and at times you may rebel against fate itself; but that which you will mostly suffer will not be of your own seeking."

"I am a little puzzled, dear," she said, gathering them all together again; "shuffle and out again."

The girl did as she told her, a flush of excitement having arisen to her fair face; and then Mrs. Dunvaston again formed the mystic circle, but she had only proceeded as far as the half when she hastily withdrew the cards.

"I never had them turn up so strangely," she said. "Out once more," and then she commenced again, but after the first half dozen had been laid before her she arose hastily.

"I am afraid my hand has forgot its cunning," she laughed, throwing the pack down. "I will tell you another time, dear!" and notwithstanding the entreaties of those who had gathered around her, she steadfastly refused to lay out another card that night.

"Why would you not go on?" Lady Aubrey asked her afterwards in confidence, when she had arisen from her seat, and together they turned from the table.

"Not for untold gold would I tell you—any one—what the cards showed me!" she answered, excitedly, the while she shuddered visibly.

Lady Aubrey would have said more, but the guests were pairing for supper, and she saw Lionel advance in search of Evie Girenstein.

But the bitter cold on the dawn of a new day was present to all before carriages were announced, and a streak of light became visible in the eastern sky when the last one drove through the gates of Aubrey Court.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. GRATH had prepared coffee for them on their return, and Matilde, who had only snatched a short sleep on the sofa in her mistress's boudoir, was in readiness to receive her when the carriage drove up to Crome Hall.

But anxious as she was to hear all from her young lady's lips, and the conquests she had made, she was doomed to disappointment, Evie feeling not only too weary to enter into details; but her thoughts were so divided between Lionel on the one hand, and the mystery which surrounded her life on the other, that she could not bring herself to do more than give curt replies to the questions which Matilde was unable to control herself from asking.

What was it, she wondered, that conversation she overheard alluded to, respecting her father; and why was it he should withhold from her the sorrow which shadowed his life?—for that he had some hidden grief, young as she was, she was not too young to see. And then, when at last Matilde had finished, and she laid her aching head on the snowy pillow, in addition to these, thoughts of Lionel ran through her brain, until in fancy she could again feel the touch of his tawny moustache, as it brushed the soft down of her cheek, his lips the first to remove the bloom which like to that of a peach had rested there; and then the love he had whispered in her ear, had it not found an echo in her breast?

She fell asleep then, dreaming it all over again, until she thought a form stood between her and her happiness, and notwithstanding all her efforts to go to her lover, who was holding out his arms towards her, she was powerless to move a limb, and then she could see it was Mrs. Dunvaston. She held a pack of cards in her hands, and as she selected one Lionel would have snatched it from her, but when he touched it his fingers became covered with blood.

She awoke then, a feeling that she was not alone overcoming her, but although she called Matilde there was no reply; and thinking it was the result of her dream she was about to compose herself again to rest, when, indistinct as the light was through the closed venetians, she was positive some one crossed the room, and then she saw the form of a woman pass through the door, closing it after her.

"It must be Mrs. Grath, or perhaps one of the housemaids," she thought, restraining the impulse she first felt to summon assistance, when a sense of weariness overcoming her, she again became unconscious.

How long she had slept she could not say, but the day must have been far advanced, for the rays of the wintry sun were making their way into her room, when in her sleep she

heard someone singing, but although she awoke then, the voice still continued.

A rich, clear voice; and as the words from *Maritana* "Scenes that are brightest," fell on her ears she raised herself in the bed to listen until, with a wail, "With none to love us, how sad they seem!" the singer finished.

It was all still then, and a few minutes after, in answer to her summons, Matilde appeared; but Evie did not care to tell her what she had heard, when it suddenly occurred to her that other night when Matilde had heard it also.

A bright sun had followed on the wet, miserable weather of the last week, which had almost succeeded in dispersing all signs of the hoar-frost which in the early morning had bestrewn the lawn with countless crystals, when Evie descended to the room where Mr. Girenstein was already seated.

Mrs. Grath had been speaking to her master, but would have left when her young lady entered.

"Don't run away because of me," she laughed. "I had no idea it was so late. Have you breakfasted, dear?" and she advanced to where Hugh was seated before a large fire.

He answered in the negative, saying he would not commence until she came down.

But he did not look up at her, as bending over his chair she impressed a kiss on his bent forehead, but remained in the same position as when she came in, his cheek resting on his hand, and his eyes steadfastly fixed on the burning coals.

Whatever it was Mrs. Grath had been saying it had left him very thoughtful, and she was very glad when she left the room, that she might by her chatter draw him from himself.

Besides, was not the morning sliding away? And she knew it would not pass without Lionel calling.

But notwithstanding all her efforts Mr. Girenstein was so absorbed in thought that he gave little heed to what she was saying, mechanically going through the form of eating and drinking, and only answering in monosyllables the remarks she made; and she all the time in a state of nervousness awaiting Lionel's knock and ring.

But scarcely had the last dish been cleared away, and her father had become absorbed in the paper, than it fell on her ears, and a few minutes after the young officer was announced.

"I scarcely thought to have this pleasure!" he said, grasping Evie's extended hand, "not thinking you would be visible; but my mother was so anxious to know how you were that she would not hear of my postponing my call till later in the day."

Evie thanked him, saying how kind Lady Aubrey was, and as their hands met, the colour flew to her temples, dyeing throat and face in one carnation hue, and drawing from Hugh Girenstein the remark that she did not look as if there were much the matter with her then.

But when Lionel had left he drew her towards him, a world of pity in his eyes, for he could not fail to see the love which, in its first dawn, had arisen in these two young hearts.

"That is a noble lad!" he said, looking from her to where the guardsman was cantering over the grass where the hoar-frost was again gathering. "His father and yours are old and tried friends; but for all that, Evie, did he ask for the hand of my little girl my answer would be No. And yet had my boy lived I could have wished nothing more than that he had been like him."

Evie looked at him then, for a sigh almost like a groan had come from his closed lips, the last sentence spoken more to himself than her.

She had grown very white, too, every vestige of the rose tint that had so lately suffused her face having vanished, leaving it pale as marble; and then, as he dropped into his former position, she fell on her knees beside him.

For awhile neither spoke, he with his face buried in his hands, only removing them to look dreamily into the burning coals, and she wondering the while what was this terrible sorrow which stood between her and happiness.

Her brother! Till then she never knew her father had a son; but for a few seconds she would not disturb his reverie, and so they remained, he still gazing into the fire, conjuring up images in the past, and her eyes studying each paroxysm of pain as it convulsed his features.

"When did my brother die?" she asked at last.

He removed his gaze then from the blazing fuel, looking sadly on her as she knelt there at his feet.

"Poor little Archie!" he answered. "He was but three years old—he would have been twenty now. But it is ever present with me how he came to me that night, and, resting his baby-head, where the golden curls had become tossed with his play, on my shoulder, he lipt his evening prayer, asking Heaven to take care of him that night!"

Hugh waited a moment, for his voice had become choked with emotion, and then he repeated,—

"That night! And I kissed his cherub mouth, after which his nurse took him; and, later on, when sleeping peacefully in his cot, the bells rang out the Christmas that was to bring good tidings to men, and I went with baby-gifts to place them in the tiny sock he had hung above his head for Santa Claus to fill."

"Silently I pressed my lips to his forehead, where the truant looks rested, praying for Heaven's blessing on my darling; and then I looked out on the night, where the cold moon shone on the white, spotless snow, leaving the room afterwards to enter that in which you were sleeping peacefully by your mother's side—a helpless, puny babe, before retiring to my own."

"The morning came—Christmas morning—and I awoke, longing to see the joy with which my boy would show me what the patron saint had sent him; but a shriek from the nursery broke on my ears, followed by the hurrying to and fro of many feet, and then the truth came to me—the cot was empty!"

"Thomas was the first to tell me, breaking it gently, and then he led me to where, on the frozen snow beneath the nursery window, all that was left of my treasure lay, scarcely less white than the fresh fallen snow-flakes, which, like a shroud, were fast covering him and a scarlet stain which had rested so bright on their virgin whiteness!"

Evie could only press her father's hand, for he was sobbing bitterly then; and when she should have asked him more he only shuddered at all it brought to his memory.

"And I suppose you will be wanting to leave me after awhile!" he said, when restraining his emotion, he let her eyes rest on his daughter; "but, my poor child, it cannot be!"

He let his hand pass over her yellow hair then, she looking up tearfully the while, sorrow for his sorrow mingling with the love she felt for Lionel, and the fear which her father's words had engendered.

But he told her no more. And so the days passed on, Lady Aubrey, as much as she could, bringing the young people together, and telling Hugh if he raised any objection that he was most selfish. He had had his day, why should they not have theirs? And if they loved each other what obstacle could there be to their marrying?

His lordship wished nothing so much as that their families should be thus united, and if he (Hugh) withheld his consent, she should consider it an insult to themselves.

And so, at last, notwithstanding all, Mr. Girenstein gave his sanction, and it became a published fact that Evie and Lionel were betrothed to each other.

(To be concluded in our next.)

ROSALIND'S VOW.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXIV.—(continued.)

VANSITTART'S voice startled Rosalind from her meditation.

"Well, you have not told me yet what impression my story has made on you; and as I set a great value on your opinion, I should like to hear it."

She turned round on him fiercely.

"You shall hear it! I consider you the epitome of everything that is mean, vile, treacherous! There is only one merit that I can see in the whole of your career, and that is its consistency! For that I give you every credit. You have, indeed, kept straight on in the path you marked out for yourself. So far as I am aware, no single deed of honesty, kindness, or unselfishness has been permitted to interfere with your uninterrupted course of wickedness! You have blighted everyone who came in your way! You have ruined lives that, but for you, might have been happy! You have rendered desolate the homes of those who had a right to count on your protection! What more can I say to give you a true idea of your own baseness?"

He winced as she spoke, not at the words themselves, but at the scathing bitterness of the tone.

She looked like an inspired prophetess as she stood there, uttering her denunciations in a loud, clear voice that never faltered.

That she was in his power she did not stay to remember; she only knew that she was filled with wrath and scorn and bitterness, and that at this man's door lay the death of her sister and the ruin of her own happiness.

"You do not pause to choose your words," he said, with a forced laugh. "However, candour is a good thing in its way; and as I asked for it, I have no right to object. But, granting all you say is true, don't you think it might be worth while to try and reform this desperate villain, to make him see the evil of his ways, and redeem the past by a better future?"

"Reform you!" she cried, with an infinity of scorn.

"Yes. I acknowledge there is a great deal of truth in what you say, but I am not so old as to be absolutely past reformation. A good woman could make anything of me, supposing she cared enough for me."

"How is it your wife failed, then? She was good."

"So she was—after a fashion; but she never really loved me. She thought she did when she married me, perhaps, but I knew better. Besides, her nature was too cold to influence mine. Now, if I married you—"

"Hush!" with a gesture of extreme loathing. "I will not listen to you!"

"But you must! You have no alternative! I tell you, Rosalind, I love you as I have never in my life loved before. You could do with me what you would, if you only thought it worth while to try."

"Which I do not," she interrupted, laconically.

He took no heed of the remark.

"It is true we are both married, but they are marriages in name only; and divorces are easy enough to obtain. Forget everything that has passed here. Come with me to America, and I will atone for my errors by a life of such devotion to you as no woman ever had before. We shall be rich, happy, and I will make you my wife!"

He came nearer, but she retreated. She felt a curious absence of horror or shame at his infamous proposals, which was due to the fact that all her thoughts were concentrated on the one great discovery she had just made.

Vansittart seemed so far beneath her contempt even, that she had grown, within the last few minutes, to regard him only as some venomous reptile, whom she could crush with

her foot. She ignored the fact that reptiles can sting—fatally!

"Do not waste words by going over this ground again," she said, with superb scorn. "Nothing that you can do or say will make me regard you with less aversion."

His face darkened, the veins on his forehead stood out dark and swollen like cords. He bit fiercely at his moustache, and a minute later sprang forward and seized her hand in his. Spite of all her efforts—and she was a strong woman—she could not escape from that powerful grasp, and his breath fell hotly on her cheeks as he bent forward.

"You are obdurate, my beautiful prisoner! You will not be wooed by fair means, therefore we must try foul. You have said I am consistent in my line of action, and I will act up to the character you have given me. Do you know why I told you this story of your sister? Because I wished you to see that I never fail—that when I strike I strike home. My love for Maraquita died when I found she cared for Hawtrey, otherwise I would have made her mine in spite of herself even, but vengeance contented me. What I wish to impress upon you is that my love for you is no school boy's fancy, but a passion that dominates my whole being. I will conquer you yet, my Moorish princess, in spite of your scorn—in spite of yourself!"

At that moment the sound of a voice below, sharply calling his name, reminded Vansittart that Diana had returned, and supper was waiting.

He released his hold of Rosalind's hands and muttered a low curse as his eyes fell on the jewel-box, which she, too, must have seen, though, of course, she did not recognise it. However, it was no use cursing his own imprudence now, and he consoled himself with the reflection that Rosalind would have no chance of making use of her knowledge, seeing that in less than forty-eight hours she would be on her way to America.

Accordingly, without more ado, he lifted the box into the safe, then closed the latter with the spring. After that, he turned again to Rosalind,—

"As you have been clever and persevering enough to effect an entrance into this room, you shall be permitted to remain in it; but I cannot comfort you with the assurance that it is any the less well guarded than the adjoining one. Still, it gives you a larger area for exercise, so perhaps your labour has not been thrown away!" saying which he made her a low bow and departed, taking care to lock the door and put the key in his pocket as he went.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR KENNETH TAKES THE LAW IN HIS OWN HANDS.

SIR KENNETH was painfully disturbed by the unexpected mention of his wife's name, and her connection with the murder of Fulke Marchmont. His dignity would not allow him to hold any further parley with Mr. Causton, but he resolved to fathom that mystery, if only for the sake of his own name, which Rosalind bore.

"She herself is nothing to me," he muttered, after the lawyer had gone, and he was left alone. She is no more than the veriest stranger; but I must not let my name be dragged into the mire of publicity, neither must I allow her to be persecuted by a false accusation—for it is absurd to suppose that she had anything to do with the murder. In spite of her behaviour to me I cannot forget that I am her protector, and I will do my duty, for duty's sake!"

But how to set about the difficult task of finding Rosalind! He had neither seen her nor heard from her—to the best of his belief—since their parting in the wood on their wedding day—for of course he knew nothing of her former residence at Weir Cottage; and—to look for her in London was about as hopeful a task as hunting for the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay!

Nevertheless, to London he resolved to go, and, having made up his mind, he lost no time in carrying his resolutions into effect, for he went at once into the village, ordered a trap, returned, and packed up such few things as he thought it necessary to take with him, and at seven o'clock was at the railway station, taking a ticket for town.

While he was in the booking-office he saw Mr. Causton, who had reluctantly torn himself away from the charms of Weir Cottage and Janet, and was also on his way to London. It chanced, quite inadvertently, that the two men were put into the same compartment—a first-class smoking carriage—of which they were the sole occupants. Sir Kenneth curtly returned the lawyer's salutation, then lighted a cigar, and soon became absorbed in the columns of the evening paper.

Mr. Causton, however, was not to be put off so lightly. He had made a mistake, and he determined to rectify it; but he waited patiently until the Baronet had exhausted the newspaper and thrown it down with a little yawn of impatience, and then he said, frankly,

"Sir Kenneth, I wish to apologise for my indiscretion of this evening—you must attribute it to professional fervour. It assuredly had no personal basis."

Sir Kenneth bowed, but made no remark, and Mr. Causton went on,—

"At the same time I tell you candidly that I shall continue my endeavours to find out where Lady Hawtrey is; and I do not despair of success."

This observation the Baronet took not the slightest notice of, and the rest of the journey was made in silence. On arriving at Paddington Sir Kenneth got into a hansom, and drove to a private hotel in Piccadilly; and then, feeling stiff and cramped from travelling, and as it was too late to take any steps towards the discovery of Rosalind, he strolled out into Piccadilly, mentally contrasting its busy aspect with the undisturbed quiet of the scenes he had just left.

All at once, amongst the many faces flashing past him, he saw one that he recognised—a fair, handsome, evil face, with a mocking smile curving the lips under the heavy moustache—none other, in fact, than Pierce Vansittart. He was walking along rather quickly, with a cigar in his mouth, and so absorbed in thought, that he had no idea of Sir Kenneth's proximity.

The Baronet paused a moment in indecision. He wanted to see Vansittart, but such a late time of night seemed rather unfavourable for the achievement of his object.

In spite of this, however, Sir Kenneth determined to follow him, and insist on speaking to him, for he knew how uncertain Vansittart's movements were, and that if he did not catch him now there was no saying how long their meeting might be deferred.

Accordingly, he followed close in his footsteps, and was relieved to find that Vansittart's destination was his chambers, which were quite close at hand. Luckily, he never turned round, and so Sir Kenneth was able to enter the room unperceived. It was only when he closed the door—which Vansittart had left ajar—that the latter discovered his presence, and his surprise was as great as his vexation.

"May I ask the reason of this intrusion?" he said, making the best of the position, and speaking in a tone of covert insolence, while he leaned easily on the back of a chair facing the Baronet, who stood close to the door.

"I am come on an errand whose difficulty, I am quite aware, it would be hard to estimate. In a word, I am come for the purpose of making you tell the truth," rejoined the Baronet, quietly.

Vansittart bit his lip, and cast a malignant glance at the speaker.

"You are pleased to be rude, Sir Kenneth Hawtrey!"

"I fear rudeness is inseparable from can-

dour so far as you are concerned. You must blame your own conduct, not me."

At this moment the clock on the mantelpiece struck, and Vansittart glanced up uneasily.

"I will talk to you another time, Sir Kenneth. It is late, and I have an appointment," he said, nervously.

"Your appointment must wait."

"But that is ridiculous! My appointment is of importance I would remind you."

"And so is my business."

"Surely not so important that it cannot as well be stated to-morrow!"

"I decline to trust to to-morrow. You evaded me in Devonshire, but you will not evade me here."

Vansittart looked at him from under his bent brows, and saw how stern and resolute an expression his face wore.

Evidently the Baronet had quite made up his mind that the interview should take place, and the other was keen enough to recognise this.

He threw himself into an armchair, and with a fine assumption of indifference, lighted a fresh cigar.

"All right! Cut what you have to say as short as possible. By the way, won't you be seated?"

"Thank you—no!"

"As you will," returned Vansittart, shrugging his shoulders, and smiling superciliously.

"Now, what can I do for you?"

"You can tell me the truth concerning Mara-

quita de Belvoir!"

Vansittart started. The coincidence struck him, and he changed countenance a little.

"The truth concerning Maraquita de Belvoir! I don't understand you. When I saw you last you asked me to show you her letters, and I told you they were destroyed. What more do you want?"

"Whether the letters were destroyed or not I cannot say; but that you shall give me a full explanation of your former relations with her I am determined. When I announced my engagement to her, you told me she had been secretly betrothed to you, and in token of it you showed me the locket you are at this moment wearing on your watch chain, besides other proofs. I did not doubt you then, but from events that have occurred since I have reason to believe you told me a lie. Maraquita died through disappointment of my apparent desertion of her."

"More fool she," sneered Vansittart.

"You will be good enough to refrain from comment," said Sir Kenneth; then his mien changed. He drew himself up. His lips set themselves in a line of stern determination. He took a step forward, and his eyes absolutely flashed fire as they met Vansittart's.

"You have lied to me and fooled me to your heart's content, but now I will not be fooled any longer. Tell me the truth. Confess that your story of being engaged to Maraquita was a fabrication, concocted for the purpose of serving your own vile ends! Speak, Pierce Vansittart! and as you value your life, speak the truth!"

His voice rang out clear and loud, like a silver clarion, and though Vansittart was no coward, he shrank back a little, with an involuntary movement of fear. Then courage returned to him, and with it a certain reckless bravado, mingled with a burning desire to humble the haughty Baronet, who, for the second time, had proved a rival to him.

He rose from his chair and faced Sir Kenneth, an evilly triumphant smile on his lips.

"You want the truth, do you? Well, you shall have it, and much good may it do you! I did tell a lie when I said Maraquita had been engaged to me, and the story of her giving me the locket as a love-token was a lie as well. But I believed then, as I believe now, that if it had not been for you she would have cared for me; and perhaps, if I had married her, I should have been a better and happier man."

"The fates were against it, and you prevailed

over me, as you had done all your life long. Do you remember when we were at College together how you were always above me—not in one thing, but in everything? Do you remember how jealous I was of you, and the fight we had, which ended in your victory? See—he pushed back the hair from his brow, and showed a small mark on his left temple—that is the scar of the old wound, where your ring cut me; and so long as that endures, so long my enmity to you will survive. Even then I vowed I would be even with you some day, and it was for that reason and no other that I allowed myself to become reconciled to you, and even pretended to be friendly. I knew that as your avowed enemy I should have no chance of injuring you. It is your friend who can deal you the deadliest blow, and so I accepted an invitation to your mother's house, in order to meet you on your return from your travels, and it was then I grew to love Marquita. Are you any the better for this confession? Is it a satisfaction for you to learn that you trampled on a woman's heart that belonged wholly to you—that for your sake that same wretched woman ended her life by her own act, and that she lies in a dishonoured grave, branded with the crime of self-murder?"

"You infamous scoundrel!" broke from Sir Kenneth's white lips.

The other was quite unmoved by the epithet, although he had worked himself up into a white heat of rage that showed itself in his twitching muscles and unsteady hands.

Passion had got the better of him again, and he yielded himself wholly to its influence, unmindful, even, of prudence, in the desire to triumph over the man he had so long regarded as his enemy.

"Hard names don't hurt!" he sneered. "I am used to them, and heed them as little as a few drops of water on my coat. They are not the weapons I make use of, as I have already proved; and, in token of it, I will give you another piece of intelligence that will hardly tend to make you happier. You are proud of your name—proud of the heroism of the men who have borne it, and the purity of the women. What will you say when I tell you that my revenge for old wrongs is complete, inasmuch as your wife—*Lady Hawtrey*—is at the present moment under my roof, and on the point of eloping with me to America?"

To describe the fiendish exaltation of the man as he uttered these words is as difficult as to describe their effect.

The Baronet reeled back like a drunken man, and caught hold of the corner of a table for support. But it was only for a moment he gave credence to Vansittart's assertion; then a certain innate belief in Rosalind's purity came back to him, and with it an overwhelming tide of passion against the black-hearted villain who had thus traduced her.

There are times when, even in the most civilised and refined of men, the old brute instinct asserts itself, in spite of culture—in spite, almost, of one's own nature. It was thus with Sir Kenneth now. He did not stay to reason; he felt that Vansittart had uttered a base slander, and his answer to it was a blow dealt with a powerful hand and unerring skill, that, an instant later, stretched Vansittart senseless at his feet.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

At this juncture the door was pushed open, and there stood on the threshold a tall, female figure, dressed from head to foot in sombre black.

It was Diana Blackmore, the housekeeper from the Lodge at Chiswick; and as her eyes fell on Vansittart's inert form there appeared on her lips the shadow of a contemptuous smile. But she did not waste her attention on him.

Turning to the Baronet, she said swiftly,—

"Is your wife's name Rosalind Hawtrey?"

Too surprised to speak, Sir Kenneth made a gesture of assent, and the woman went on, still in the same low, eager tone,—

"Do you know where she is?"

"I do not," answered the Baronet. "If you can tell me, you will lay me under an obligation."

"Then you want to find her?"

"Assuredly!"

"In spite of what Pierce Vansittart has just said?"

"How do you know what he has said?" demanded Sir Kenneth.

"Because I was at the door, and have overheard the greater part of your conversation," she returned, equably. "Did I listen on purpose? you would ask. Yes, I did. I wanted information, and I got it, though not exactly in the way I supposed I should."

"What do you know of my wife?"

"Not much, it is true; but I know where she is at the present moment—The Lodge, Chiswick."

Sir Kenneth turned paler, if possible, than before. He knew the house, having been there in the lifetime of Vansittart's father, and, if Vansittart had spoken truth in this particular, then perhaps—

But his thought got no farther, for the woman seemed to have divined it in some mystical manner, and said, quickly,—

"I should add, she is there against her will. I can prove that. In effect, she is a prisoner."

"A prisoner!"

"Yes, and her jailor is the man lying there. Stay; I have no doubt I can put the key of her prison in your hand."

And as she spoke Diana advanced towards the prostrate figure of the still senseless man, and took from the inner breast-pocket a leather memorandum case, from which she produced a bunch of keys.

One of these she placed in the hands of the surprised Baronet.

"All you have to do now is to go to Chiswick and release the lady."

Sir Kenneth felt like a man in a dream, and for a minute or two could only stare at his companion in a half-stupefied manner that was, under the circumstances, quite excusable.

For it must be remembered that until this evening he had had no idea that Vansittart was even acquainted with his wife; and, although he had come to London for the express purpose of finding Rosalind, it was little less than marvellous that he should succeed in discovering her whereabouts on the very evening of his arrival.

It is not surprising, therefore, that he accepted Diana's communication with some doubt.

"How can I tell you are speaking the truth?" he asked, but holding the keys firmly as he spoke.

She laughed in her usual sardonic manner.

"You cannot tell; but you may take it for granted, especially as I am ready to lead you to the place of your wife's incarceration. I have nothing to gain by telling you a lie, and you have nothing to lose by coming with me and testing the veracity of my statement."

"That is true."

"Then, shall I take you to The Lodge?"

"Yes, I will follow you."

She turned round at once, but, half-way to the door, seemed struck by a fresh idea, and went back to the lamp, by whose light she glanced over the contents of the pocket-book, her face darkening ominously the while.

Amongst other notes and memoranda was a letter directed to herself, and placed in an envelope, which she at once tore open. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR DIANA.—By the time you read this I shall be out of England, and, as the date of my return is extremely uncertain, I think it better to make arrangements for a long absence."

"Accordingly, I wish to shut up The Lodge, which I shall sell at the first available opportunity; therefore, you will kindly look out for a fresh home; and, as a token of my goodwill at parting, I enclose you a cheque for twenty-five pounds, which you will accept as a little souvenir."

"You will have found out by this time that the illness of your sister was a little ruse I practised on you for the purpose of getting you out of the way, but I am sure, under the circumstances, you will forgive it."

"Your presence would have been awkward at this moment, as I doubt whether your feelings to the lady who has been staying at The Lodge are altogether friendly."

"That lady, I may mention, will be on her way to America with me when you get this. You will, I am sure, recognise the wisdom of my proceedings, and also my desire to spare your feelings as much as possible."

"It is unlikely that we shall ever meet again, but you will always believe that I take a sincere interest in you, and have every good wish for your future prosperity."

"PIERCE VANSITTART."

The woman's black brows met over her angry eyes, and her teeth ground themselves together.

"To think," she cried aloud, with a furious gesture of abhorrence, "to think I have loved, lived for, sinned for this man!"

And she spurned with her foot the prostrate form, over which Sir Kenneth was now bending, for Vansittart lay so motionless that the Baronet had been seized with a panic as to whether he was indeed alive.

His fears were groundless. Vansittart's heart still beat, and even as Sir Kenneth placed his hand upon it the wretched man moved slightly, and a low moan issued from his lips.

"You need not be afraid," Diana said, scornfully, observing the action, and interpreting it aright. "He is reserved for a more ignominious fate than death at the hands of a gentleman. Come, we waste time; and remember that your wife is a prisoner, and, therefore, each moment is lengthened tenfold for her."

She led the way downstairs, and he followed, still with a feeling of unreality, as if these events were all part of a dream.

Although it was now one o'clock there were yet plenty of people about, as well as hansom cabs; and Diana hailed one of the latter, got into it, and told Sir Kenneth what address to give the driver.

Sir Kenneth took his seat by her side, and would have questioned her, but she made a peremptory gesture of silence; and, leaning forward, so as to get the full light of the lamp, began to read through the whole of the papers contained in Vansittart's pocket-book, which she had brought with her. Evidently these documents displeased her, for her face grew darker and darker as she perused them.

And now, for the benefit of our readers, it may be as well to mention the series of incidents that had culminated in her appearance before Sir Kenneth at so opportune a moment.

As is already known, she was by no means pleased at Rosalind's presence at the Lodge, and was more than inclined to regard Vansittart's story of the mistake as a subterfuge on his part.

He had peremptorily forbidden her to hold any sort of communication with his prisoner, with the result that Diana's curiosity was considerably increased by the mandate, which it is probable she would at once have disobeyed but for the important fact of Rosalind's rooms being locked, and Vansittart himself having the key.

The girl's meals were sent up and down by means of a dumb waiter, which, by some complicated mechanism, came up through the floors, and communicated with the kitchen below, and the windows were barred so securely that entrance through them, even by

means of a ladder, was quite out of the question.

The outer doors, too, were very thick, and so Diana had no means of communicating with Rosalind, and finding out who she really was.

Nevertheless, that she was not a willing captive she already knew from her efforts to escape; and, in spite of Vansittart's assertion to the contrary, she suspected that he had a sinister motive in running such a risk.

When Vansittart had completed his arrangements with Gaston he was quite cognizant of the fact that, in order to carry them to a successful issue, it would be necessary to get rid of Diana, who would assuredly interfere with them if she could.

He had, therefore, had a false telegram despatched from York, where the housekeeper's only sister lived, and it urged Diana's immediate presence at this sister's dying bed.

The housekeeper at once got ready, but, oddly enough, just as she was about starting, there came by post a letter from her sister, dated the day before, and apparently written in the best of health and spirits, saying that she proposed coming to London the next week, and asking Diana to meet her at the station.

At first Diana was puzzled, then a light broke upon her, but she determined to make assurance doubly sure.

Accordingly, she left the Lodge, accompanied by Vansittart, who had come over early in the morning, and took a ticket for York. Vansittart stayed with her until the train started, and an indescribable something in his expression, as he bade her good-bye, warned her that her departure was a relief to him.

"I will prove myself your match yet!" she muttered, as she leaned back in her corner, and watched him from behind the curtain; and at the very next station she alighted, and sent off a telegram to her sister, with the answer prepaid.

She had not more than half-an hour to wait before the reply was put in her hand, and, as she expected, it contained a denial of being ill, or of having sent a previous wire.

Diana smiled grimly as she read it, and at once took a ticket back to King's Cross; but she had some little time to wait before her train came in, and it was late in the evening when she finally reached the Lodge.

Arrived there she let herself in with her latch key, and found the house apparently deserted. Her first action was to go up to the door of the room where Rosalind had been confined, and push a tiny rolled-up piece of paper through the keyhole. On this paper she had written a few words—

"Are you still there, and if so, what is your name? Write on the back of this.—A FRIEND."

The answer came back promptly enough.

"I am still here, and at the mercy of a man who knows not the meaning of honour or pity. If you are, indeed, a friend, have compassion on me, and release me. My name is Rosalind Hawtreys."

A few more slips of paper were pushed backwards and forwards through the keyhole, and it ended in Diana declaring her intention of doing her best to obtain the girl's release, and starting off for Vansittart's chambers, with the consequences we have seen.

The memoranda in the pocket-book, and the letter she had read, addressed to herself—but which Vansittart had not intended she should have until he was well out of England—further enlightened her, and left no doubt that the man's intentions were to get rid of her, once and for ever, and by the gift of twenty-five pounds rid himself of all his obligations towards her.

Sir Kenneth felt his heart beating rather quicker than usual as they drove through the dark, deserted roads, and gradually neared their destination. As to whether this woman had really spoken the truth, or whether she was laying a trap into which he had walked with his eyes open, he could hardly tell—

time alone could show. If she was, indeed, conducting him to his wife, then he and Rosalind would meet under circumstances almost as strange as those under which they parted.

The Baronet's eyes grew stern as he thought of that farewell. No matter whether Maraquita had been badly treated or not, her sister had taken such means of avenging her as he could never forgive!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

INFLEXIBLE!

AND how, during all this time, was Rosalind herself faring?

The solitude of her prison did not affect her half so much as the fear of its being invaded by Vansittart, and she had ample food for reflection in the disclosures he had made to her, which had wrought so complete a revolution in her ideas.

But, for all that, it was very terrible to be there hour after hour, with no break in the monotony save when the dumb waiter made its appearance with her luncheon or dinner on it, and went down, almost as it came up, for poor Rosalind's anxiety left her little appetite.

What the end of it all would be she could not tell, or to what lengths Vansittart's lawless passions would carry him, and the suspense was almost as dreadful as certainty would have been.

More than once she mentally cried out for her husband to come and rescue her; but alas! what claim had she upon him—him whom she had deceived and deserted?

Most of her time was passed pacing backwards and forwards, for inaction was unbearable in her present frame of mind, and a fear that constantly tortured her was lest her mind should give way under this perpetual strain.

To make any further attempts to escape would be, as she knew, useless. The outer doors were too thick to allow of being out through, as the door of communication between the two rooms had been; and, besides, her poor little penknife was broken, so she had no weapon to work with. All she could do was to wait with what patience she might, and see what turn events would take.

That she would be rescued seemed too slender a hope to rely upon. Her friends were so few—Claud, Nona, Edith, and the Selwins—and as none of them were likely to know of her captivity, so none of them would be likely to make efforts for her release.

No; her own ingenuity and woman's wit was all she had to trust to, and sometimes they seemed to her the rottenest of rotten reeds.

She had ample time to think over her past life, and reflect on the terrible mistake she had made. Her whole existence had been dedicated to the task of vengeance, and lo! it had recoiled on her own head.

Of her joy, when that tiny wisp of paper came fluttering through the keyhole, we will not speak.

Who her mysterious "friend" might be she could not tell; but she could lose nothing by telling her under what circumstances she was brought to the Lodge, and there was no reason why she should conceal her name.

After Diana had gone the young girl tried to buoy herself up with the hope that at last rescue was close at hand; but sometimes she grew desponding, and told herself the hope was fallacious, and she must prepare for the worst.

And so the hours passed by, sadly, drearily, each one dragging out its weary length more slowly than the other.

She had lighted the lamp, but had not drawn the blinds, and she alternated between the two windows at the ends of the room, peering into the dusk, but able to discern nothing from the one but trees, and nothing from the other save the river.

A dead silence reigned in the house—not a door banged, not a footstep creaked on the stairs.

The clock struck eleven, twelve, one; and yet the gruesome stillness remained unbroken.

Rosalind's nerves became strained to such a tension that she could have screamed aloud, if only for the sake of disturbing the weird spell of quietude by the sound of her own voice.

At last it seemed to her she heard a faint noise that might have been the shutting of the front door, and a few minutes' later there came the sound of a key being fitted in the lock of the door.

Her heart stood still. Was it Vansittart come back, or—? Before she could formulate her hope the door was flung wide open, and on the threshold stood the last person in the world she expected to see—her husband!

He advanced a step forward, and she, with a half hysterical cry, flung herself at his feet.

"Kenneth! Kenneth! you have come back to me; you have forgiven me!" she cried, wildly, incoherently, clinging round his knees, while her beautiful hair, broken loose from its fastenings, swept the floor like a veil. "Oh! my husband, my husband, say you have forgiven me—say you will take me back, and blot out the past!"

His lips quivered, but his stern face grew sterner. He bent down and unclosed her clinging arms—or, rather, would have done so, had she not vehemently repulsed him.

"No, no; I will stay here until you have pardoned me. This is my place, and I will keep it. See how humble I am; see how my proud spirit is broken! You have conquered, Kenneth, and here, on my knees at your feet, I express my contrition. Will you not forgive me?"

"Control yourself, Rosalind," he said, coldly. "Remember we are not alone."

"I care not if all the world sees me!" she cried, wildly. "I deserve my punishment—but not that it should be eternal. Kenneth, have you not one word to say to me—not one word?"

Her voice broke into a wailing cry, and she raised her lovely, tear-wet eyes to his. Sir Kenneth was no stoic, and he had to turn away lest his resolution should be melted by the exquisite beauty and pathos of that imploring face.

He glanced round. Diana, who had followed him up, had now withdrawn, and with a certain instinctive delicacy left husband and wife alone.

It is needless to say that Sir Kenneth was wholly unprepared for such a scene as this. He was quite unaware of the events that had taken place since his parting with his wife, and the changes they had wrought in her feelings; and although, for the sake of duty and the name she bore, he had felt it incumbent upon him to protect her, his own mental attitude had not changed in the least degree.

"Rise, Rosalind," he said, retreating a step, and shaking himself free from her clasp. "This is no time for such protestations. Let us leave this house without delay. Surely you have been here long enough!"

She obeyed him, inasmuch as she rose to her feet and stood opposite to him, her face worn and haggard, but still most lovely, in the light of the lamp. Her bare, white arms, from which the drapery had fallen back, were outstretched, and her attitude was none the less supplicating than when she grovelled at his feet in her agony of humiliation.

"What good will escape do me if I fail to win your love?" she exclaimed.

Sir Kenneth raised his brows, and smiled, bitterly.

"My love!" he repeated. "It is not so long ago since you spurned it as scornfully as you would spurn some noisome worm."

"I was mad then—I am sane now."

"Indeed! I had almost thought it was the other way about."

"Do not be hard on me, Kenneth! I have suffered enough already."

Something in her words seemed to sting him, for he turned on her fiercely.

"And do not you think that I have suffered as well? Do you think your taunts fell on deaf ears? Do you think I am a stone or a block of wood not to be touched by the bitterest contumely—the most heartless cruelty—the most deliberate deception?"

Lower and lower drooped her head. She dared not raise her eyes.

"All that you say is true. I do not deny it."

"And yet you ask me to forget it?"

"Yes; for the sake of the love I bear you." Again he laughed contemptuously.

"You must pardon me for being sceptical as to the existence of such love. If you had loved me, you would not have treated me as you have done."

"But that is over and past. Recollect, too, that if to sin is human, so to forgive is divine. I know how horribly I have behaved to you; I know that not one man in a thousand would forgive me. But you are not as other men; you are nobler, better, more generous; prove it by this supreme act of pardon! No Magdalen ever repented as I do; if I could only make you understand my misery and my contrition; if you could only see into my heart, I know I should not plead in vain."

As she ceased speaking he looked at her for a moment in silence; then he shook his head.

"I confess I cannot understand this change of demeanour on your part. How is it that a few months ago you sent me from you declaring that, of all men, I was the most hateful to you, and now you wish me back?"

"Because since our wedding-day I have learnt the truth, and I know that you are innocent of my sister's death."

"Ah! Who told you this?"

"Pierce Vansittart. He confessed his treachery towards you and her; nay, I use a wrong expression—he boasted of it. If I had only known it earlier, what misery we both might have been spared!"

"You are right, but there is something more to be said. Even if your idea of me had been a true one; if I had, as you said, won Maraquita's love and thrown it aside, you would not have been justified in what you did. I was not answerable to you for my sins. No, nothing can excuse you; and as for your pretended love," he turned away with a gesture full of scorn, "you must forgive me if I decline to believe in its existence."

Amplified he had avenged himself for the slights she had heaped upon him! But Rosalind recognised a sense of justice in his words—if she had not done so she would hardly have had courage to continue her entreaties.

"I loved Maraquita so dearly," she cried, in eager self-extenuation. "She was all the world to me, and think what it was to lose her! Think, too, of my lonely childhood, and the influence such a tragedy would have on my mind!"

"I have thought of it all," he returned, with stony inflexibility, "and it does not alter my opinion."

"I was so young!"

"And that renders your crime all the more unnatural. If you had acted on the impulse of the moment, if you had been carried away by a sudden gust of passion, I might admit an excuse. But it was not so. You laid your plans with a quiet determination; you worked patiently and persistently until your ends were obtained; and then you triumphed over your victory and your victim. Are not your words stamped in letters of fire on my brain? Can I ever forget the agony of my wedding-day, and the miserable months that followed it? And not only that, you destroyed my faith in all that was good and beautiful in womanhood. You were my idol, and I saw you thrown down from your pedestal, earth-stained and debased! No, Rosa-

lind, your repentance comes too late—my love is dead!"

"No! no!" she shrieked, throwing up her arms with a movement of utter despair. "Do not say that—anything but that! Tell me I must wait—I must prove my penitence! Set me some task, banish me from you for a time—a year, two, ten years—only say that at last you will give me your pardon and your love!"

There was something almost terrible in her vehemence. She pleaded as some condemned wretch pleads for life. And, indeed, it was more than life that was slipping from her grasp.

Never until this moment had she actually realised how much she loved him. He looked so noble, so strong, so handsome, even in his unbending sternness; and to think that in her mad folly she had trampled on the precious gift of his love!

It was difficult to recognise beautiful, cold, imperious Rosalind in this passionate creature, carried out of herself by love, forgetting her old pride, conscious only that her last chance was vanishing, and then seized with a cold numbness of despair, as she saw how utterly unmoved Sir Kenneth seemed.

It was all of no avail! An idol carved in stone could not be more inflexible—outwardly. Inwardly a battle was raging in his breast; for in spite of his assumed stoicism he was touched to the heart by his wife's agony; but that stern justice on which he prided himself would not let him betray this weakness. Her misery was wrought by her own hand, and she must bear the consequences! He had borne them during all these long months since they had parted, and would go on bearing them to his life's end.

It was but just that her punishment should equal his.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NONA EXPLAINS.

EDITH CHARLTON often used to wonder whether she was indeed the same girl who had run races with Monk under the sun-flecked shadows of the elms a few short months ago. Life was altogether changed now, and she went listlessly about the house, too languid to play, too restless to read—a very shadow of her former self.

"How is it I never hear you laugh now?" the old Squire said to her. "You used to be always skipping and singing about the place, and now you do nothing but moan."

"And do that badly!" she returned, with a desperate effort at cheerfulness. "I know I'm a fraud, daddy dear, but I can't help it. Perhaps when the spring weather comes I shall pick up, and be myself again."

The Squire looked dubious. Privately he thought there was little chance of her looking herself again, while Claud languished in prison—for the old man suspected his daughter's secret now, and it made clear many things that had formerly puzzled him.

On the day after Mr. Canston's visit Edith was sitting alone in the morning-room, some fancy work on her lap—in which, however, she had not as yet put so much as a stitch! Monk was lying at her feet, his nose on his paws, watching with supreme scorn the playful evolutions of a little black kitten, that had possessed itself of Edith's thimble, and was now rolling it about on the floor.

It was a lovely day for the time of year, the sky blue, the air soft, and pale gleams of wintry sunshine coming in through the window, and falling on Edith's face, and pretty rippling hair.

"Oh dear!" she sighed, putting out her hand to stroke the dog's massive tawny head, "what a complicated business life is, Monk! For my part, I think it would simplify matters very much if I were to go straight away into a convent, and rid myself of the cares of the world at one bold stroke. What do you say, dear doggie?"

Monk beat the floor with his tail, and looked up into her face with his large, intelligent eyes full of sympathy. The girl bent down and kissed him.

"You could say so much if you could only speak," she said. "Ah, if men and women were only as true and honest as you! What a different place the world would be."

Again Monk wagged his tail, thereby assenting to this business, and just then a servant came in to say that a visitor wished to see his young mistress.

Edith looked up with languid interest.

"A visitor! Who is it?"

"She would not give her name, miss; but—" lowering his voice, mysteriously, "I think it is the blind lady who was here the other day, and who has something to do with Mr. Stuart."

Edith rose to her feet, and began to tremble.

"I will not see her—I cannot! Tell her so," she exclaimed, sharply.

The servant withdrew, was absent a few minutes, and then returned—disobeying his mistress's orders for the sake of the half-sovereign pressed in his palm by the persistent visitor.

"If you please, miss, the lady says she won't detain you long, and her business is most important."

"It does not matter. I do not care!" Edith cried, excitedly. "Tell her again I refuse to see her—"

What more she would have added it is hard to say, for even as she spoke the door was pushed gently open, and a silvery voice said,—
"Ah, Miss Charlton, do not deny me an interview! The matter on which I would speak to you is one that nearly concerns yourself. Pray—pray hear me!"

Nona Vansittart had followed the servant in, guided by the sound of his voice, and now she pushed past him and stood a little way from the door, feeling her way before her with outstretched hands and the unconscious appeal of the blind in her attitude.

Edith hesitated, and Nona divined this, and added, quickly,—

"Let my affliction plead for me—it is the one claim I have upon you."

The footman discreetly withdrew, closing the door after him as he went, and Edith found herself forced either to accede to the request of her very unwelcome visitor, or to lead her to the door. Naturally, she chose the former alternative.

"I do not know what you can have to say to me," she observed, stiffly.

"I will tell you in as few words as I can. I have seen Claud this morning—"

"Hush!" cried Edith, imperatively. "I wish to hear nothing concerning Mr. Trevelyan—at least from your lips."

Nona passed over the taunt in silence.

"And yet," she said, reproachfully, "you once called yourself his friend!"

"So I was—once," Edith returned, her voice faltering a little; "and so I should be still if I thought him worthy of my friendship."

"He is worthy of it," vehemently. "He is one of the best and noblest men in the wide world. I have cause to say it."

"And you ought to be the last person to believe it," Edith rejoined, pointedly.

"Ah, I hear the note of suspicion in your voice, but you wrong him—indeed, indeed you do! It is for the purpose of proving this that I am here now."

"Your journey is a lost one, then!" cried Edith, angrily determined. "I have no wish to discuss Mr. Trevelyan with you—no wish to speak of him—think of him, even."

"Not even when you know that the bitterest part of his present trial is the knowledge of your aversion?"

Edith looked a little startled. This was the last thing she expected to hear.

"It is the truth," went on Nona, coming a step nearer, and groping about so as to avoid a possible collision with the furniture.

Edith observed the action, and involuntarily

sprang forward and laid her hand on the blind woman's arm so as to guide her. In a moment Nona had seized hold of the slim white fingers and held them firmly in her own.

"Now listen to me," she said, impressively, "and, believe me, you will be more than glad after you have heard what I wish to say. When I saw you last it needed not sight to tell me that you mistrusted me; and, casting about in my mind for the reason of this, I came to the conclusion that it must have something to do with Claud, for all you know of me must necessarily have come through him. Well, I formed a theory—I need not tell you what it was—and when I went to see Claud this morning I questioned him on the subject. At first he tried to evade me, parried my questions, and endeavoured to lead me off to some other topic, but I was persistent, and would not be repulsed. Finally I got him to confess that he loved you, and had once been engaged to you, and that the reason of your parting was—myself."

Edith uttered a faint little cry, and tried to wrench her hand away, but her companion would not let it go.

She resumed,

"I had half suspected this, and I forced Claud to tell me the whole story. He has enough to bear, poor fellow, in this awful accusation that is brought against him, without the added misery of misinterpretation on the part of the woman he loves!"

"Loves!" exclaimed Edith, incredulously.

"Yes—loves! I repeat it!"

"Then why did he not explain his conduct?"

"Because a chivalrous sense of honour forbade it!"

"That is to say," satirically, "he kept silence out of consideration for you, and because he did not wish to confess his own dishonour!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Nona, sternly. "You know not how terribly you misjudge him! I will not pretend that I do not understand what is in your mind, but Claud was my dearest friend—my more than brother! He was never my lover!"

"You deserted your husband's home for him!"

"Yes; because my husband's home was unsafe for me to remain in; because I feared the man whose name I bore, and I will tell you why."

We need not go over her story, which is already known to the reader.

She kept nothing back. Told how by accident Claud had shot her when defending her from her husband; and how, from that time, he had constituted himself her defender and friend.

Then she went on to tell of her little nephew, and the tragedy that resulted in his death; and at this point she broke down, and burst into a storm of passionate, regretful sobs, which Edith had some difficulty in soothing. Then came the recital of how Claud took the Cedars, and she, in order to evade pursuit on the part of her husband, disguised herself as his mother.

She narrated her history simply and graphically, and as she concluded, said,—

"Part of this I have already told to your father, but I made him promise to keep it secret. You may imagine how bitter it is for me to reopen old wounds thus, but it was my duty to let you know Claud's real character, and the sacrifice he has made on my behalf. Now do you forgive him?"

Great tears were rolling down the young girl's cheeks. She felt the tale was true, and she saw that her lover had only been faithful to his word when he refused to enlighten her after Fulke Marchant had given his version of the tie that bound the supposed mother and son together. How she had misjudged him! and how cruel Fate had been to both of them!

Nona softly passed her arm round her companion's shoulder, and touched her wet cheek.

"You will let him know that you have forgiven him?" she whispered.

"Forgive him!" cried Edith. "What is there for me to forgive? Rather say, let me ask his forgiveness. But," she added, despondingly, "perhaps he no longer cares for me!"

"My dear," Nona said, simply, "love is not for a day, but for ever!"

(To be continued.)

FACETLE.

A YEARNER QUESTIONED.—He: "My darling, you must be mine. I yearn for you every day." She: "That's all right; but what I want to know is, will you earn for me every day after we are married?"

WOMAN (to tired tramp, who is resting at the gate): "If you'll come round to the back door I'll give you a piece o' pie." Tired Tramp: "Thanks, ma'am, not any; you gave me a piece of pie when I passed through this part last summer."

NO TROUBLE IN MEETING BILLS.—"Tom, I gave you a very liberal allowance when I sent you to college; nevertheless I hear that you have had some trouble in meeting your bills." "Not the slightest in the world, father, I assure you. It has been all I could do to keep out of their way."

WILLIE: "What makes you come to our house so often, Mr. Hankinson? Do you want to marry our Irene?" Miss Irene (taken by surprise, but realizing, with rare presence of mind, that Mr. Hankinson has got to say something now): "Willie, you impertinent boy, leave the room!"

NO FOOLING WITH THAT FAMILY.—"Yes, George," she said, "Uncle James is a lawyer, as well as papa and Uncle Henry." "Plenty of lawyers, dear," he remarked, with a loving smile. "Yes, George; but they are handy for a young lady to have in the family in the event of any crawlingfish, you know."

Mrs. Ragson (welcoming her liege lord to supper): "Tired: are you? You have been sitting at your ease at Kennington Oval all the afternoon; and then to tell me you are tired!" Mr. Ragson (meekly): "My dear, I have just been watching our club lose its ninth consecutive wicket. It's enough to make any man tired."

A DISHEARTENED CAR PORTER.—Conductor: "Heavens, Mose! why do you want to hang yourself?" Suicidal Porter: "Hain't I got 'nuff to make enny man hang hisself? Ther's twenty to 'pa's of shoes in dis kyar, an' nineteen an' russet leather, while de res' am owned by wimmen. Farewell, vain world, I see gwine home."

IN A LAMENTABLE DILEMMA.—First Youth: "By jinks, Harry, what's the matter? Did Clara Vere de Vere refuse you?" Second Youth (sadly): "No, she accepted me." "Then what in creation are you looking so blue about?" "I spent so much money courting her that I haven't enough left to buy an engagement-ring."

FINDING HER OUT.—"And so," said he, bitterly, when he realized that she had rejected him, "and so you have been flirting heartlessly with me all the while. Well, thank Heaven, I have found you out at last." "Yes," she replied, "you have; and, what is more, I think you will always find me out hereafter when you call."

THEY WERE OF THE WRONG SIZE.—"Those stockings are all wool, I presume?" she said, as she requested the clerk to wrap her up a half-dozen pairs. "Oh, yes, miss," he answered, in thoughtlessness, "they're all wool and a yard wide." "Sir!" she exclaimed, indignantly; and before he fully realized what he had said, she whisked out of the shop.

NAOMI: "George, do you prefer the summer to the winter?" "No! I like winter best." "Do you like it for its snows and storms and desolate grandeur?" "Not exactly: I like it because my ice-cream bills don't run up so thundering high."

LEADER of lynching party: "Now, young man, make a full confession, or up you go." Prisoner: "I was fooling with a gun, I pointed it at my brother, and—" "You didn't know it was loaded?" "No." "Men, pull on the rope and let him swing."

"What's thim?" said Mulcahey, pointing to the life-preservers on deck. "Those are life-preservers," said the officer. "Oh, life-preservers, are they? Thin why don't yez send thim to ther hospitals, where ther's plenty dying and dying all the time, bodad?"

Mrs. Pompano: "Mary Ann, just run across the street and ask that man with the white-wash-bucket if he is engaged." Mary Ann (returning after an animated conversation with Julius Plumbob): "Please, mum, he says he's been married for twelve years."

DUMLEY (who has sold a watch): "You told me, Robinson, that if I would let you have the watch you would pay me in thirty days. It's a good deal more than thirty days now." Robinson: "Not by that watch; that watch loses twelve hours out of the twenty-four."

"Did you bake these bisonits?" he asked, at the supper-table. "Yes, George. I made them expressly for you," she winningly replied. "And yet," said George, vainly trying to pry open a bisonit, "you have always told me you loved me, and couldn't live without me!"

INVALID: "I have been here at these springs, doctor, six weeks, and I don't see that the water has had the slightest effect." Doctor Candid: "You must have patience. There was a man here last season who didn't die until after he had been here two months."

BURGALAR: "I have followed the profession of housebreaking for ten years, and have never been arrested. I have a new job nearly every night." Pickpocket: "But aren't you afraid the police will get the drop on you?" Burglar: "Not much. I live next door to the station-house."

Mrs. Quiver (waking in the night): "John, I'm sure there's burglars downstairs!" Mr. Quiver (sleepily): "Stuff! Let 'em burgle." Mrs. Quiver: "Oh, John! didn't you promise at the altar to protect me?" Mr. Quiver: "Bah! And didn't you promise to obey me? It's a stand-off."

Young Mr. Sissy (who prides himself on his music): "So you would like to hear me sing before I go, would you, Bobby?" Bobby (politely): "Yes, sir, if you would be so kind." Young Mr. Sissy: "Are you particular about what I sing?" Bobby: "Yes, sir. I would like to hear some of what sister Clara calls your alleged sinings."

SHE: "Hush! not another word." He: "Oh, don't decide now, don't, I beg of you! Take time to consider. Remember the happiness of life!" "Do hush! For mercy's sake stop! Wait!" "Wait? I'll wait a century, if need be. Like Jacob, I'll serve—" She (after rushing frantically around the room and peeping into all the corners): "He isn't here after all." "Who—who? Oh, have I a rival—have—" "Calm yourself, Mr. Nice-fellow, I—I thought I heard my little brother in the room. Go on."

It was getting late, when the girl said, shyly: "You look worried about something, Mr. Harkinton." "I am," he replied. "I have in my pocket a fifty-thousand-pound package of government bonds which I foolishly forgot to deposit to-day, and—aside from that—I love you so devotedly, Miss Schermerhorn, I am afraid to learn my fate." "As for the bonds, Mr. Harkinton," replied the girl with a business air, "papa has a safe in the house; and regarding the other matter, why—why, I think so many of us are apt to borrow trouble, Mr. Harkinton."

SOCIETY.

THE visit of the Prince of Wales to Derby races filled a good many of the best houses in the neighbourhood with guests, and they attended the races at which His Royal Highness was present. The Earl and Countess of Loudoun entertained a number of friends at Willesey Hall near Ashby-de-la-Zouch, among whom were Lord Howard of Glossop (brother of the Countess), the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Fitzwilliam, the Hon. Miss Clifton, Captain Seel, Captain Campbell, Captain Dawson, the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton, Mrs. Frewin, Mr. Burns, and others. A party of about thirty went to Derby; and when the Prince's horse Magic came in first, the scene in the ring resembled that of a pandemonium, in which His Royal Highness heartily joined, by taking off his top hat and waving it over his head in true popular fashion.

A CORRESPONDENT of *Modern Society* writes:—"All Norfolk is still talking about the Sandringham birthday ball, and what a success it was. A word about the dresses, as these are still the theme of comment. No need to say of what sort, in a certain very high quarter, when we mention that, instead of sable robes, the Princess of Wales wore white satin! On her head was the 'Silver Wedding' tiara; and a handsome parure of pearls and diamonds lit up the sheen of her snowy toilette, everyone agreed that she looked charming; and that the three younger Princesses, who were dressed in white tulle, made a very bonny trio, with three as happy faces of enjoyment as one could wish to see at a ball. The display of jewellery was something dazzling.

We are requested to say that the Princess Louise has consented to inaugurate the newly-formed North London branch of the Recreative Evening Schools Association at a meeting to be held at the Highbury-Athenaeum on the 1st of next month.

DONA ISIDORE CONSTINO, of Chili, enjoys the reputation of being the richest woman in the world, possessing a fortune roughly estimated at between seven and eight millions sterling. The Dona is about to undertake a European tour, and intends to visit England. This fact is gravely announced in a Chilean paper, which adds, in reference to the millionaire's call at London, that, "If she likes the place, she may probably buy it!"

RECENTLY was solemnized, at St. Peter's Church, Eaton-square, the marriage of Mr. John Hurleston Leche, only son of Mr. Hurleston Leche, of Carden Park, Chester, with Kathleen Marie, eldest daughter of Mr. Donaldson-Hudson, of Chesterfield, Market Drayton. The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a beautiful dress of white satin duchesse, trimmed with fine old point d'Alençon and sprays of orange blossoms, which were arranged as a fringe on the drapery crossing the front of the skirt; and the bodice was trimmed with pearl embroidery. She wore orange blossoms in her hair, and her tulle veil was fastened by a diamond and pearl spray, the gift of the Chesterfield tenantry, and other diamond ornaments.

There were seven bridesmaids in attendance, who were dressed in costumes of white silk, draped with white-striped gauze and trimmed with gold braid; their hats were of white felt, trimmed with white velvet, and slashed at the back with gold braid. Each wore a gold pin set with a single pearl and the initials "J. K." in diamonds, and carried a bouquet of white and yellow corymbiums intermixed with ivy and maidenhair, the gifts of the bridegroom.

Mrs. Donaldson-Hudson, mother of the bride, was attired in grey velvet, with a very long train, the bodice being trimmed with grey sole de Chine and revers of gold-striped silk, and bonnet to match with white wings.

STATISTICS.

THE FORESTS OF THE UNITED STATES.—Separating the States into groups, the six New England States are credited with a forest area of 19,193,028 acres; the four Middle States with 17,630,000; the fourteen Southern States, including Maryland and leaving out Missouri, with 232,800,000; the nine Western States with 80,358,767; the four Pacific States with 52,630,000; and the seven Territories with 63,034,000. It will thus be seen that of the entire 465,645,895 acres of forest included in this estimate, the fourteen Southern States possess fully one half. These statistics show, says the *Philadelphia Times*, that, while the process of denudation has been carried to an unhealthy extreme in the Eastern, Middle, and a few of the Western States, the forest area still remaining in this country is a magnificent one. If the estimates of the department are approximately correct, the timber lands of the country, exclusive of Alaska, cover an area equal to fifteen States, the size of Pennsylvania. If proper measures are taken to prevent the rapid and unnecessary destruction of what is left of our forest domain, it should be equal to the requirements for an indefinite period. It is not as yet a case of looking the stable after the horse is stolen, and should never be allowed to become so.

GEMS.

THE weak sinews become strong by their conflict with difficulties.

THE man who feels certain he will not succeed is seldom mistaken.

NOTHING can work me damage, except myself; the harm that I sustain I carry about with me, and never am a real sufferer but by my own fault.

THE violence of sorrow is not at the first to be striven withal; being like a mighty beast, sooner tamed with following than overthrown with withstanding.

EVERY man who rises above the common level receives two educations. First from his instructors; the second, the most personal and important, from himself.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FRIED LIVER AND BACON.—Cut the liver and bacon in thin slices. Fry the bacon a good brown, remove and place in the liver dredged with flour, and seasoned with salt and pepper. Cook well and thicken the gravy, to which add a little water, with flour stirred smooth in cold water.

EGGS AU GRATIN.—Cut some hard-boiled eggs in slices; lay them on a well-buttered dish, with grated Parmesan cheese, black pepper, and the least bit of powdered nutmeg; sprinkle some baked breadcrumb over all; put the dish in the oven, and serve as soon as the contents begin to colour.

FISH WITH TOMATOES.—Cut the fish in pieces; fry it in boiling lard, a light-brown, having first rolled the fish in corn-meal. When done, set it to one side, where it will keep warm, and put some tomatoes in the skillet with a little onion, and stir them until they are done; then pour over them a little boiling water. Season with pepper and salt; pour over the fish, and serve hot.

WHITE CORN MUFFINS.—One-half pint each of white corn meal and sifted flour, a heaped teaspoonful of baking powder, one tablespoonful of sugar, a scant half teaspoonful of salt, two tablespoonfuls of butter, a large half pint of milk and two eggs. Sift the dry ingredients together, add the beaten eggs to the milk, and pour upon the meal, &c. Add the melted butter, then pour into a pan, tin plates, or small tins.

MISCELLANEOUS.

MARRIAGE is not an arbitrary institution; it is the physical and moral union of one man and one woman, who thus become one person; and any injury offered to marriage to its unity, its holiness, is a violation of natural law, a senseless rebellion against the Creator, a source of miseries and disorders almost innumerable.

IMPATIENT OR CARELESS.—The man who writes illegibly is impatient or careless, or as is frequently the case, lazy. To write lines so closely together that the division between them is almost imperceptible, to make confusing abbreviations, or figures that may be taken for any of the numerals, to scrawl a signature that is as much Egyptian as English in its chirography and to make the body of a communication a succession of meaningless loops and curves, is as senseless as it is impertinent. The man who writes this way from preference must be inflated with a sense of his own importance or indifferent to the heavy draft he makes upon the time and patience of his friends and business associates.

A DANGEROUS BLOW.—You may have read that pathetic poem of Browning's which commemorates the act of an Earl of Arundel, who, having struck his little child on the head, had the picture of himself and the child painted—the child, as he became in after years, imbecile from the effects of that blow. It would be well, we think, for every parent, and for all those having children on their hands, to commit these verses to memory, and put the lesson in practice, for the injury done to children by the quick and careless box on the ear that is thought nothing of at the time, is something incalculable. It is impossible to hit a tender child a blow upon so delicate an organ as the ear, and one having such close connection with the brain, without doing an evil and unseen work, even when the blow is given with the flat of the open hand.

GLASS CLOTH.—A Frenchman has invented a process of spinning and weaving glass into cloth. The warp is composed of silk, forming the body and groundwork, on which the pattern in glass appears, as effected by the weft. The requisite flexibility of glass thread for manufacturing purposes is to be ascribed to its extreme fineness, as not less than from fifty to sixty of the original strands are required to form one thread of the weft. The process is, slow, for no more than a yard of cloth can be produced in twelve hours. The work, however, is extremely beautiful and comparatively cheap. A French paper, commenting on the discovery, says: "When we figure to ourselves an apartment decorated with cloth of glass and resplendent with light, we must be convinced that it will equal in brilliancy all that the imagination can conceive and realize; in a word, the wonders of the enchanted palaces mentioned in the Arabian tales."

NO NERVES.—To all appearances Chinamen have no nerves. The Chinaman can write all day, work all day, stand in one position all day, weave, beat gold, carve ivory, do indefinitely tedious jobs for ever, and ever, and discover no more signs of weariness and irritation than if he were a machine. This quality appears early in life. There are no restless naughty boys in China. They are all appallingly good, and will plod away in school without recesses or recreation of any kind. The Chinaman can do without exercise. Sport or play seem to him so much waste labour. He can sleep anywhere—amid rattling machinery, deafening uproar, squalling children, and quarrelling adults. He can sleep on the ground, on the floor, on a bed, on a chair, in any position. It would be easy to raise in China an army of a million men—nay of ten millions—tested by competitive examination as to their capacity to go to sleep across three wheelbarrows, head downward like a spider, their mouths wide open and a fly inside.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

DRUMMOE AND IRENE VIOLET.—See answer to Nellie G.

R. G.—You are much too young to think about such things. You had better be improving your mind by study.

P. H. W.—Consult by letter or in person any manager of a theatre. You will be given full information upon the subject.

DAISY.—Blues and browns are best suited to your style. White you may wear occasionally; and black suits everyone.

EGGIE IN TROUBLE.—You had better make a clean breast of the matter to your husband. You will be far happier by doing so.

ALICE'S ADMIRER.—The young lady is much too young to know her own mind in such matters, and you had better cease from attempting to cultivate her acquaintance for at least two years.

B. H. W.—The mistletoe is very common in the southern and western counties of England. It grows upon a great variety of trees. The American species is similar in general appearance to the European.

V. V. V.—The present usually thrown on the stage in token of admiration of the genius of the actress is a bouquet of flowers as choice as the purse of the giver would allow. Any florist would tell you how they are made up.

J. A. H.—As far as we are able to say, the name is pure English. 2. We regret we are unable to oblige you. You must apply at the Herald's Office. 3. Kindly say which of the three countries you were born in, and whether before or after 1857.

NELLIE G.—We do not profess to tell character by handwriting. Cloth is best cleaned by liquid ammonia diluted with one fourth water, applied with a sponge. Cambrades and sweet oil is the best stimulant for the hair. Borax and water will clean it.

CESARION.—In England the sovereign is the supreme magistrate, the head of the Established Church, of the army and navy, and the fountain of office, honour, and privilege, but is, nevertheless, subject to the laws unless exempted by name. The sovereign could therefore be punished for crime.

LOVER OF "THE LONDON READER."—1. A fish diet is generally fattening, and may account for your becoming stouter. We should doubt the illness having anything to do with it. 2. As it was your own fault that the quarrel was commenced, you certainly ought to speak first, and ask forgiveness.

AMY J.—To make parsnip wine:—Boil one bushel of sliced parsnips (taking care they are not bruised) in sixty quarts of water one hour, then strain it; add forty-five pounds of lump sugar; boil one hour more, and when cold ferment with yeast, and then add a quart of brandy, and bottle. March and October are the best months for making it.

B. W. F.—The tutelary saint of England is St. George, who was a tribune in the reign of Diocletian. He was a man of great courage and capacity, but was thrown into prison and beheaded 23rd April, 300, for complaining to the Emperor of his severities towards the Christians, and arguing in his defence. He was chosen as the patron of the Order of the Garter by Edward III.

B. N.—Glad to have pleased you with our answer to your query. Give your friend for Christmas something you have made yourself. As you knit and crochet beautifully, a knitted shawl, mitts, crocheted slippers or hood, would be pretty. All these things are worn. The knitted slippers with bows of cherry or blue ribbon are much used for the house, and the mitts will be as much worn as they were last season.

M. N.—You can have artificial teeth put in without extracting the roots if you like. The dentist often do this, do doubt. It is better, though, to have the teeth pulled, and have what the dentist call "clean gums." No more bother with decaying roots. If you are afraid to take gas, cocaine applied to the gums will deaden the pain, and a good drink of brandy or dose of morphine will stimulate you so you will feel hardly any pain. Make up your mind to bear it, and half the battle is won.

E. V. A. incloses the picture of a gentleman and asks what we think of the face. It seems the face of a practical, intelligent, prudent man, who has good ideas about business and a very fair opinion of himself. He will be apt to be kind to his wife, but not indulgent. He will love her almost as well as he loves himself, and he will never let her want any of the necessities of life. That is our idea, judging from the face. Your writing is good. Its indications are of an impulsive, sensitive nature.

F. N. S.—1. Presumably it is a sign of awkwardness on the part of either the lady or gentleman. 2. Certainly not, and every right-minded girl would resent it. 3. Worse and worse. 4. By acting in quite an opposite way to that suggested in your previous questions. 5. A man may admire and flirt with a pretty girl who is free and forward, but he is not likely to marry such a one. 6. No lady would commit such a folly. Such a custom never really existed. 7. Yes; wait for a couple of years, at least, before being engaged. 8. If a young lady cannot tell whether a young man she knows, is in love with her better than anyone, like ourselves, who have never seen him or her, she must be extremely simple.

B. S. S.—In the language of flowers the violet means modesty.

R. C. W.—Charles I. was beheaded at Whitehall on the 30th January, 1649.

R. S.—The famous silver mines of Potosi are in Peru, in a mountain the shape of a sugar loaf.

W. F. N.—The right of primogeniture still obtains in this country, but it was abolished in France in 1790.

J. W. B.—The first pillar letter-box was erected at the corner of Fleet-street and Farringdon-street in March, 1855.

F. W. S.—Ordinary ink stains on the fingers from much writing may be readily removed by rubbing well with a piece of lemon.

C. S. S.—Potash is the oxide of the metal potassium, which was discovered by Sir Humphrey Davy in 1807. He also obtained sodium from soda, and calcium from lime.

S. L. S.—The word bissextile, as applied to Leap Year, comes from the Latin, and refers to the added day which, by the Roman Calendar, as reformed by Julius Caesar, was inserted every fourth year between the 24th and 25th of February. By their mode of reckoning the 31st was the sixth day before the Calends, or 1st of March, and the added day was also called the sixth, so that it was the bissextus dies, or "second sixth" day, and the year in which it occurred was called bissextilis, or that which contained the "second sixth" day.

UNDER THE SNOW.

Under the snow the daisies rest,
The violets with their purple eyes;
Cradled against earth's kindly breast,
Each sleeping blossom safely lies.

When spring time comes, the lovely flowers,
Will open their leaves, and shyly peep:
Brighter far than, under the snow,
Through the long months, they lay asleep.

Under the snow, we've laid away
Many a dear one, loved so well;
Of hopes now vanished, griefs that stay,
Only our yearning hearts can tell.

Under the snows of care and grief,
Our youthful dreams lie buried deep;
His power alone can bring relief,
Who "giveth His beloved sleep."

Under the snow we laid away
Only the casket, frail and fair;
The soul had burst from out the clay,
And nevermore knows pain or care.

Under the snow we too must sleep,
When God shall call our souls away.
And those for whom on earth we weep
Will welcome us to endless day.

For, on that fairer, brighter shore,
No snow e'er hides the daisies' bloom,
And those we loved, passed on before,
Now wait for us beyond the tomb.

J. C. S.

FIRST NIGHTER.—According to an eminent authority, the first playbill in this country was dated 8th April, 1663, and was issued from Drury Lane. It ran as follows:—"By His Majesty his companies of comedians at the New Theatre in Drury Lane will be acted a comedy called the 'Humorous Lieutenant.' The characters are next given, and it concludes thus: "The play will begin three o'clock exactly." So that in the time of the merry monarch the performances must have been somewhat in the nature of a modern *matinée*.

H. B. W.—If the lady is under age you cannot sue her for breach of promise, and if she is over age you would only make yourself ridiculous by doing so; neither can you claim the presents back unless you can prove that you gave them in express consideration of marriage. The young lady does not seem to know her own mind; perhaps she will find she does care for you if you treat her coldly, and then possibly you will be able to make it up again. It is only a lover's quarrel, which a celebrated poet tells us is the renewal of love.

M. R. C.—1. A great many recipes are given for making the hands white, but the simplest and most efficacious is to keep them always thoroughly clean and covered as much as possible with gloves or mittens. Wash in tepid water, into which a tablespoonful of oatmeal has been put, and at night anoint them with glycerine. Above all, keep them out of very hot water. 2. Helena is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, not as if written Helena. Penelope is pronounced as if written "Pennelopy." 3. Mildred means "mild speaking." Florence "a flower."

X. G. R.—1. The following is stated to be Sir Erasmus Wilson's lotion to prevent the hair falling out:—Eau-de-cologne, two ounces; tincture of cantharides, two drachms; oil of lavender or rosemary, of either ten drops. Apply to the roots of the hair once or twice a day until the hair ceases to fall out. If it has no effect after some considerable time there is probably something wrong with the general health, and the doctor should be called in. 2. Gertrude means "all truth." 3. The handwriting is an improvement on the first we saw, but is still somewhat too upright. Slope it a little more.

F. F. W.—Martha means "bitterness," Deborah a "bee," Saul "desired," Paul "little," Rachel a "lamb."

F. F.—1. Not too young if her choice is well guided. 2. Read aloud before a good judge, and your pronunciation will soon improve.

C. J. T.—The unfortunate Louis XVI., his queen Marie Antoinette, his sister and two children were arrested at Varennes on the 22nd June, 1791.

B. N.—It is entirely a matter of arrangement with his superiors. You had better apply to headquarters. We decline to furnish messages by way of an excuse.

R. C.—As you are of age your father has no claim on your clothes if bought for with your own money, nor can he prevent your going abroad if you wish to do so.

D. S. W.—1. Very pretty by many people. 2. Not necessarily. Everything depends on the expression they habitually wear. 3. Quite good enough. In future kindly write in ink.

C. N.—1. Fanny means "free," Thomas, a "twin." The other, "Fredward," we have not met, but it would probably mean a "peaceful keeper." 2. The hair is a very pretty shade of golden bronze.

F. F.—1. There is no known method of removing moles. 2. The multiplication table is supposed to have been invented by the celebrated Greek philosopher and teacher, Pythagoras, who flourished more than five hundred years before the Christian era.

R. N.—To polish a gun-barrel, first rub it with very finely powdered pumice-stone and water; then very patiently with a rag wet with linseed oil. Last of all, clean the surface with a soft linen cloth, devoid of all greasiness, dipped in powdered starch, and then rub bright with the palm of the hand.

MAY.—Stains on linen occasioned by fruit, iron-rust, and similar causes, may be removed by applying to the parts injured a weak solution of the chloride of lime, the article having been previously well washed. Then rinse the parts subjected to the operation in soft, clear, warm water, without soap, and hang out to dry in the sun.

JESSIE.—1. The engagement ring is not necessarily a diamond one; it may be of other stone. You should be governed in the purchase of such by the length of your purse. 2. The ring may be worn upon the third finger of the right hand. It is also worn by some on the third finger of the left hand, being replaced by the wedding-ring.

T. S.—It would be advisable, if you desire to live happily, to marry the man you love, and we can see no reason, provided he is a worthy object of that affection, for objection on the part of your parents. Perhaps, however, there is some objection to him which you have not mentioned. As you do not love the other party, it would be as well to let him know that such is the case, and relieve him of his suspense.

E. W.—St. Valentine was a bishop and a martyr who suffered under Claudius II., or Aurelian at Rome about 271. The origin of the ancient custom of choosing a valentine so much referred to by early poets has been much disputed, but probably arose from the fact that about this time of the year birds choose their mates. The practice of sending valentines in the shape of choice designs in lace-paper, satin, ivory, &c., is comparatively modern, and now perhaps somewhat on the decline. The most sensible valentine to send your sweetheart would be a tasteful and useful present, something he does not possess, and would like to have, not too valuable.

L. L. W.—Mushroom ketchup is not quite so easy to make as you imagine. The mushrooms must be carefully wiped and broken into an earthen pan. A handful of salt should be thrown into every three handfuls of mushrooms, and when the pan is three-parts full leave them and stir two or three times a day, till the mushrooms are liquid and the salt is all dissolved. Then set over a gentle fire till the goodness is all extracted; strain while hot through a fine hair-sieve, and then boil gently with allspice, whole black pepper, ginger, horse-radish, and an onion, with two or three laurel leaves. Some judgment is required in the use of these, as tastes differ, and, if preferred, most of them may be left out. But the onion and pepper should be used to taste. After letting it simmer for a few hours, skim well and strain into bottles, and when cold close with cork and bladder. It will keep three months. If wanted after that time must be boiled again, with some horse-radish sliced, and will then keep for a year.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. B. SPECK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KINDER, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.